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THE FARAWAY ELSEWHERE: EXPLORING SOVIET YOUTH CULTURE AND ESCAPISM IN SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION FILM AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC

by

SIGRID STANTON

Under the Direction of Joe Perry, PhD

ABSTRACT

In the Soviet Union, the Cold War space race created propaganda that contributed heavily to the mythologizing of outer space. This mythologizing of space was designed to bolster the political and scientific aims of the USSR; culturally, however, it had the opposite effect on citizens by offering futurism through science fiction media as an escape from the regime. Many Soviet youths, particularly those who came of age during the Brezhnev era, were disillusioned with communism. They sought a sense of identity and an escape from political ideology, and were drawn to subcultures centered around music, literature, and fashion among other things, as an escape from the present. In the same way that Soviet youth who were drawn to Western trends and envisioned an idealized West as a refuge from everyday life, I argue that science fiction films and electronic music also provided an escape from the present to youth.

INDEX WORDS: Soviet Union, Soviet film, science fiction, youth culture, electronic music,
electronic instruments

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ESCAPISM IN SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION FILM AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC

by

SIGRID STANTON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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2017

THE FARAWAY ELSEWHERE:

Exploring Soviet Youth Culture and Escapism in Soviet Science Fiction Film and Electronic

Music

by

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August 2017

DEDICATION

To the memory of Denis Gainty

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union produced propaganda during the space race that contributed heavily to the mythologizing of space. They did this by crafting artworks that idealized Soviet achievements, manufacturing public images of the cosmonauts, generating space education films that contained elements of speculative science fiction, as well as by including political themes and otherworldly film scores within science fiction films themselves. In these respects, Soviet cultural representations of the Space Age were infused with a sense of unreality.

Many Soviet people, particularly young people who came of age between 1965 and 1980, were disillusioned with communism, and they sought an answer to the alienation and lack of individuality they felt. As the hegemonic culture did not properly address their needs, they were drawn to foreign or fantastic media and musical or fashion subcultures as a means of fostering a sense of self, creating their own spaces in the margins of Soviet society. In the same way that Soviet youth who were drawn to Western rock and roll music envisioned an “Imaginary West,” or an idealized vision of the Western world, in this thesis I argue that the mythologizing of space enabled citizens’ disconnection from the regime, while inadvertently popularizing science fiction literature and films as a method of escapism from the present.

This quest for escapism can arguably be found in science fiction, both literature and film. Coupled with an already extant sense of unreality in space age propaganda, science fiction films made an easy target for escape from day-to-day life. The settings within outer space or fictional spaces provided the “faraway ‘elsewhere,’” fulfilling a need for escapism, while recurring motifs of seeking deeper truths instilled in them a type of individuality, or at least how to search for it. The quest for self could not be found in static authoritative language or in the pursuit of scientific knowledge alone. These films professed that self-discovery and identity could be found in

connections with other people, or in religion, both things that existed simultaneously within and without Soviet society.

Science fiction, fantasy, and horror, often grouped together as *fantastika*, comprised a smaller genre that was controversial to officials.¹ Nevertheless, some directors experienced significant success with this genre. Space education and science fiction film director Pavel Klushantsev explained that his career began with instructive popular science films for the military and for students, which impressed superiors and paved the way for later science fiction films.² Several science fiction novels were also adapted into films, such as Stanisław Lem's *Solaris*, the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside Picnic* which became Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, Vyacheslav Rybakov's *Letters from a Dead Man*, and Aleksandr Beliaev's *Amphibian Man*, of which the film adaptation became the Soviet Union's first blockbuster, at 65.5 million viewers.³ Apart from *Ivan's Childhood*, Tarkovsky's *Solaris* was his only film with over 10 million in audience attendance, suggesting an enormous "commercial potential" for science fiction.⁴ Even cult science fiction film *Kin-Dza-Dza!* (1986) had 15.7 million viewers, which was considered a small number during this time.⁵ Unfortunately, it is difficult to locate ticket sales for all films released in the USSR; however, the success of films like *Amphibian Man* and *Solaris* demonstrate that science fiction was a popular genre.

Moviegoing was a popular pastime in the Soviet Union; this "golden age of Soviet moviegoing" spanned from the 1950s through the 1980s, as there were a greater number of films,

¹ Lynn Barker and Robert Skotak, "Klushantsev: Russia's Wizard of *Fantastika*," *American Cinematographer* (June 1994), 78.

² *Ibid.*, 81.

³ Birgit Menzel, "Russian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature," in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective Vol. 78* (Munich: Sagner, 2005), 20; Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 38.

⁴ Shusei Nishi, *Tarkovsky and His Time: Hidden Truth of Life*, (Saitama, Japan: Alt-arts LLC, 2011), 122.

⁵ Gennady Ustian, "'Kin-dza-dza!': The Soviet sci-fi satire that has stood the test of time," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, August 24, 2016, https://www.rbth.com/arts/movies/2016/08/24/kin-dza-dza-the-soviet-sci-fi-satire-that-has-stood-the-test-of-time_623695.

theaters, and free time for viewers to see films.⁶ Soviet surveys from 1981 indicate that there were an estimated 108 million moviegoers per month. Of these, 53 million attended the movies once or twice a month, 33 million attended three to four times a month, and 22 million attended more than twice a week.⁷ For reference, the population of the USSR at this time was about 262.4 million, according to 1979 Soviet Census.⁸ The majority of moviegoers were under 30.⁹ The most popular genres were melodramas, followed by adventure and detective stories, cinematic epics, and comedies. Films on contemporary themes and film versions of literature were also especially popular.¹⁰ Home-viewing of films was uncommon, and bootleg films were discouraged. VCRs were uncommon until the early to mid-1980s; in 1985, there were 250,000-300,000 VCRs in comparison with 125,000 cinemas. By 1986, there were only two video rental stores in Moscow, and twelve nationwide.¹¹

The Soviet government carefully oversaw the film industry. It was difficult to bypass censorship, as all film studios were government-owned; independent film studios ceased to exist in the Soviet Union following a 13 February 1930 decree which established Soyuzkino, a government organization that exerted control over the entire film industry.¹² The Soviet film industry released few films during Stalin's administration, due to his strict censorship.¹³ Following his death, a new administration, Goskino (the State Committee for Cinematography)

⁶ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 74.

⁷ Linda Lubrano, et al., "The Soviet Union," in *Survey Research and Public Attitudes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. William A. Welsh, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), 20-21.

⁸ V. Perevedentsev and Mary Meyer, "Early Results of the 1979 Soviet Census," *Population and Development Review* 6, no. 1 (March 1980), 169.

⁹ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 73.

¹⁰ Lubrano, "The Soviet Union," 21.

¹¹ Thom Shanker, "Soviets' VCRs Often Wrapped In Yards Of Red Tape," *Chicago Tribune*, (March 17, 1986), articles.chicagotribune.com/1986-03-17/news/8601200130_1_vcr-market-bootleg-tapes-video.

¹² Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.: 1998), 45.

¹³ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 28.

was created, which oversaw the Soviet film industry until the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁴ As with literature, Soviet film experienced a period of liberalization during Khrushchev's Thaw, but it was not until *glasnost* that the film industry saw a significant decrease in censorship.¹⁵

Nevertheless, film was an important part of both Soviet culture and politics; by the 1960s, the USSR had one of the largest film industries in the world.¹⁶ Film was a means of reaching the Soviet people, with "the goal...to elevate everyone" artistically.¹⁷ Vladimir Lenin's famous statement, "Cinema for us is the most important of the arts" was stated "in every publication, recited at every meeting," as, unlike television and radio, film was considered an art form instead of mass media.¹⁸ Olga Klimova's dissertation on Soviet youth film provides further insight on the cultural value of film in the Soviet Union, stating that "cinema was viewed as one of the most important sources for developing patriotic feelings among Soviet citizens."¹⁹

The majority of scholarship on Soviet film concentrates primarily on early Soviet cinema, films released after *glasnost*, historical films, or those that depict day-to-day life. Few sources focus on science fiction or fantasy films. As some of the most popular films in the Soviet Union were science fiction films, particularly adaptations of science fiction novels, it is worthwhile to examine the popularity of science fiction literature among Soviet citizens as well, especially as information on science fiction readership comprises a larger portion of current historiographical research than information on science fiction film viewership. Western scholarly works on Soviet science fiction and subcultures centers on mostly science fiction literature instead of film, and these focus on science fiction writers or the literature itself in historical context. Such work

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵ Louis Menashe, "Glasnost in the Soviet Cinema," *Cinéaste* 16, no. ½ (1987-88), 30-31.

¹⁶ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁹ Olga Klimova, "Soviet Youth Films Under Brezhnev: Watching Between the Lines," PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh (2013), 63.

offers important historical and theoretical context for this thesis. Rosalind J. Marsh's 1986 book, *Soviet Fiction Since Stalin*, for example, discusses the dissatisfaction of Soviet youth with socialist ideology, citing a 1961 *Komsomolskaya Pravda* poll that stated that "many young people wanted a personal aim in life in addition to (or in contradistinction to) the social aim of using their scientific or technical skills to 'build communism.'"²⁰ Patrick L. McGuire's 1977 book, *Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction*, breaks down the different types of narratives in science fiction books, as well as providing valuable information on science fiction readership by drawing from Soviet polls. Unfortunately, Soviet and Russian science fiction "has mostly been dismissed as both trivial and ideologically contaminated literature" in Western scholarship, making it difficult to find informative works on this topic.²¹

The thesis also draws on research on youth subcultures in the Soviet Union. Prior to 1991, Western research on Soviet youth culture typically examined subjects that indicated resistance by ordinary citizens and projected a strong pro-West bias onto Soviet citizens.²² The most popular subjects were subcultures which held a fascination with the West, whether through Western musical genres, like jazz and rock and roll, or Western clothing trends. Popular music was a particularly key site for dissent, whether covert, overt, or perhaps more often ambiguous, so it is worth discussing this literature at some length. In addition, while the secondary literature written before 1991 on Western music subcultures and science fiction in the U.S.S.R. rarely discussed both subjects, later scholars, such as Alexei Yurchak and Donald J. Raleigh, suggest that Soviet youth were interested in Western trends alongside Soviet science fiction. Though the

²⁰ Rosalind J. Marsh, *Soviet Fiction Since Stalin: Science, Politics, and Literature*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1986), 217.

²¹ Menzel, "Russian Science Fiction," 4.

²² S. Frederick Starr, "The Rock Inundation," *The Wilson Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Autumn, 1983): 58-67; Jim Riordan, "Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change," *Soviet Studies* 40, no. 4 (1988): 556-72; *Soviet Youth Culture*, ed. Jim Riordan (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989.); Pedro Ramet and Sergei Zamascikov, "The Soviet Rock Scene," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 1 (1990): 149-74.

topic requires additional research, there may have been a significant cross over effect, in which fans of popular Western music enjoyed science fiction films and literature as well.

S. Frederick Starr's article, "The Rock Inundation," argues that rock and roll music "encouraged 'social deviance' as an end in itself," citing the use of English in amateur rock bands' songs and the wearing of Western fashion as dissident acts. Some of these works highlight the notion of ambiguity; Jim Riordan states that "Soviet youth is as richly diverse as is youth in any modern society," and may not all be "agitating for change" in the same way. He also remarks that Western studies, in particular, may be unbalanced, as they argue that Soviet youth is "rebellious and deviant on the one hand," and "conservative and traditional" on the other. His 1988 article, "Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change" adequately explores the differences among Soviet youth groups and offers insight into the state of youth culture in the Soviet Union by the end of the 1980s, but it is rife with contradictions and imposes a political nature on many actions by young Soviet people that may not have been intended as such.

Published in 1990, Pedro Ramet and Sergei Zamascikov's article "The Soviet Rock Scene" uses a less politically-driven approach than Riordan, but the topic of music appears difficult to disentangle from politics. An in-depth view of the personal political affiliations of Soviet youth is largely omitted. The authors discuss the growth of the Soviet rock scene and the evolution of official opinion, ultimately arriving at an interesting conclusion: "it is above all the authorities who make rock music a political question."²³

These earlier articles are evidence of the inability of Western and Soviet academics to "talk cross-culturally."²⁴ According to Hilary Pilkington, many Western scholars "were accused by their Soviet counterparts of falsely imputing to youth both class interests and a consciousness

²³ Ramet and Zamascikov, "The Soviet Rock Scene," 166.

²⁴ Hilary Pilkington, "'The Future is Ours': Youth Culture in Russia, 1953 to the Present," in *Russian Cultural Studies*, eds. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 368.

of them.” While this is no doubt a product of the political atmosphere in which these works were published, it has been detrimental to gaining a coherent understanding of Soviet youth culture. By casting these types of subcultures as sites of active resistance to the regime, Western historians overlook trends within the Soviet Union that may have been easier to access or less politically charged. On average, ordinary citizens were, overall, neither dissidents who were supporters of capitalism or Western politics and ideology, nor activists strongly in favor of communism. In addition, if the majority of citizens involved in subcultures actively resisted the regime, the Soviet government would likely have suppressed youth subcultures to a much greater degree than evidence indicates.

By the late 1990s, academic works on Soviet youth culture began examining the degree of class consciousness among young people, as well as their level of involvement in politics. In addition, the works of Russian scholars became easier to access by Western scholars. Pilkington’s study is one example: she explores Soviet youth culture beyond rock and roll music, touching on gender, sexuality, those involved in the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), and other *tusovki* (youth cultural groupings, or milieus.) She argues that the vast differences between rural and metropolitan youth culture renders it impossible to discuss “‘Soviet youth’ as a single category.”²⁵

In the early 2000s, historians and other scholars began to focus in detail on the identities of Soviet youth through interviews with those who came of age between the 1960s and 1980s. A more accurate picture emerged: while there were those who were indeed politically active (whether for or against the regime), most Soviet youths fell somewhere in the middle or chose to ignore politics altogether.

²⁵ Pilkington, “‘The Future is Ours,’” 378.

Anthropologist Yurchak was groundbreaking in the realm of Soviet history, as he discusses these different political stances in depth; his ideas about everyday life in the Soviet Union are central to my own arguments about science fiction films. Yurchak states that dissidents and activists were considered outsiders by their peers; many ordinary citizens were apolitical, or believed in a future where the flaws within communism might be resolved, while acknowledging that there were problems within the present. One major factor was that many young Soviet people who considered themselves good communists and believed in the progressive nature of socialism did not view Western music as at odds with these ideals.

From an anthropological and linguistic perspective, Yurchak provides insight into the fascination that Soviet youth had with the “Imaginary West”—a fictional representation of Western culture that was manifested through music and branded items, such as blue jeans or cigarette cartons. These tangible items served to create a type of Western world that existed within Soviet culture, providing a retreat from Soviet official discourse and politics. This fascination with the West was in part enabled by the state in two ways: first, through the rigid official language of the Party, and secondly, due to the inability or the unwillingness to outlaw Western items and media and prosecute those who were drawn to them. In this thesis, I suggest the “imaginary elsewhere” of science fiction played a similar role.

The means by which Soviet official speech was constructed and subsequently, how the Soviet citizen’s political identity was constructed in the post-World War II period created a gap between one’s political role and one’s private role. Soviet authoritative discourse, particularly authoritative language, underwent a shift in the early 1950s. Under Stalin’s leadership, authoritative language became “highly normalized, fixed, and citational at all levels of structural organization,” as a means of eliminating capitalist elements from the Russian language, and

reinventing it in socialist terms. As a result, the “performative” aspect of language took precedence over the “constative” or truthful meaning. In other words, the authoritative speech used by officials was so repetitive that it began to lose meaning.²⁶

Subsequently, Yurchak states that diverse, “unanticipated” meanings and interpretations of this language, and, by proxy, reinterpretations of visual propaganda, became a ubiquitous part of Soviet life. He argues that this disconnect between official discourse and alternative interpretation by Soviet citizens created a deterritorialization of both Western and Soviet culture, in which Soviet youths who followed these trends lived *vnye* (a Russian word meaning “outside”), or simultaneously inside and outside of Soviet culture.²⁷ This desire to live *vnye* was a result of the weakening of Soviet propaganda on Soviet youth, and the rise of a type of material culture that was representative of changing ideals, as manifested in the conception of an idealized West. The impact of this material culture can be observed in the considerable black market for Western items ranging from blue jeans to music albums. “Fashion and style, like film and music, became important arenas for producing new worldly identities and imaginations, contributing to the emergence of the Imaginary West,” states Yurchak.²⁸

The effect of this deterritorialization was most profound on the generation that came of age between 1965 and 1980. During the 1960s, the existence of “spatially and temporally distant worlds” in the Soviet Union could be observed in “the explosion of interest...in various cultural and intellectual pursuits based on the experience of a faraway ‘elsewhere,’” Yurchak states, listing pastimes that range from avant garde jazz to science fiction. By the 1970s, this desire for a

²⁶ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 50.; Christoph Neidhart, “Book Review of Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010), 204-06.

²⁷ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 128.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

“faraway ‘elsewhere’” had become even more profound.²⁹ Ekaterina Dobrotvorskaja argues that, during the Brezhnev era, the government’s “limitations on behavior,” mandated involvement in politics, and ignorance of trends and entertainment for young people caused many youths to retreat from societal expectations.³⁰ Riordan echoes this sentiment, stating that the “excessive bureaucracy, sermonising, hypocrisy and invasions of personal lifestyles” by the government only served to alienate many youths.³¹ Thus, it is almost guaranteed that Soviet youth would turn from official views to opposite views that could “answer the needs of the young generation.” Addressing their pervasive boredom, alienation, and the lack of individual identity, Dobrotvorskaja states that many “found in rock music a compensation for the one-dimensionality and linearity of those socially proscribed planes on which we existed.”³² The development of subcultures, whether through Western music and trends or other means of mental escape allowed them to develop the sense of self and meaning that was denied to them within Soviet society.

In addition to analyses of science fiction literature, in depth information on science fiction subcultures can be found in science fiction *samizdat* (self-publishing) fanzines. Scholars analyzing *samizdat* largely focus on dissident material, whether political tracts or censored literature, providing a narrow view of the breadth of these publications, and overlooking the importance of culture, not politics alone, as a defining part of Soviet life. While *samizdat* was considered unofficial literature, however, it ran the gamut of fairly innocuous fanzines for rock and roll music or science fiction literature to anti-communist political treatises. As mentioned above, works on the topics of Soviet youth culture and the influence of Western trends reinforce binary socialism – that is, support of or opposition to socialism – by drawing a clear delineation

²⁹ Ibid., 160.

³⁰ Ekaterina Dobrotvorskaja, “Soviet Teens of the 1970s: Rock Generation, Rock Refusal, Rock Context,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (1992), 145.

³¹ Riordan, “Soviet Youth,” 568-569.

³² Dobrotvorskaja, “Soviet Teens of the 1970s,” 146-147.

between the “official” and “unofficial,” often using terminology such as “dissident,” “outsider,” “avant-garde,” and “underground,” which can prove to be problematic.³³ Many of these groups did not see themselves or their actions as “dissident,” and the lines between “official” and “unofficial” were often blurred.

The largest collection of *samizdat* in the West is the *Arkhiv Samizdata*, by Radio Liberty; yet, this collection focuses on political and religious documents, largely omitting *samizdat* on literature and poetry.³⁴ The omission of non-political *samizdat* in this case makes it seem as if writing *samizdat* were a largely dissident activity, when in many cases it was not. Among literary *samizdat*, science fiction was a popular topic; science fiction fan clubs would often publish their own fanzines with short stories written by club members or other unprofessional writers. Andrei Chertkov’s 1990 bibliography, which documents a majority of the science fiction fanzines from 1978-1989, lists 46 separate publications. Unfortunately, this thesis does not analyze any of these works carefully, as they are difficult to access and no satisfactory archive of literary *samizdat* exists in the West.

Another facet of science fiction and future-oriented media is electronic music; by the early 1960s, electronic film scores were commonplace in science fiction and space education films. The past twenty-five years has seen a variety of scholarly works on the development of electronic instrumentation and electronic musical laboratories in the Eastern Bloc, such as Tatjana Böhme-Mehner’s 2011 study of the GDR, Libor Zajicek’s 1995 thesis on the Czech and Slovak Republics, and articles by musician Stanislav Kreichi on the Soviet ANS synthesizer.³⁵

³³ Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20-21; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 34.

³⁴ F. J. M. Feldbrugge, *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union*, (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1975), 7.

³⁵ Tatjana Böhme-Mehner, “Does the GDR Have its Own Electroacoustic Sound?” *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb. 2011): 33-47; Libor Zajicek, “An oral history of electro-acoustic music of the Czech and

Articles focused on science fiction film scores, like those by Jeremy Barham, Stefan Smith, and, in particular, James Wierzbicki's studies on electronic instrumentation in science fiction, both as diegetic and non-diegetic sound, contribute significantly to understanding how science fiction and electronic music were connected in the popular consciousness.³⁶ There are few academic sources on Soviet electronic groups and the development of synthesizers for the consumer market, although the 2013 documentary *Elektro Moskva* explores this topic, and several fan sites exist online.³⁷

I suggest that the subcultures into which many citizens retreated were often a shelter from political ideology rather than a form of rebellion against it. A reading of science fiction and other forms of media, such as electronic music, that embodied this futuristic ethos in historical context and those who were drawn to it provides a more balanced view of the lifestyles of Soviet citizens, particularly young people, their responses and reactions to the politics of the time, and their quest for selfhood and individuality. While art and politics cannot be completely separated, it is important to find a balance between over politicization and locating science fiction media and subcultures within historical events. I believe that, by focusing on subcultures that were distinctly Eastern European at their roots, we can understand the motivations and feelings of a greater number of Soviet youths, who otherwise may have avoided political involvement or anti-establishment forms of escapism.

Slovak republics," Master's Thesis, San Jose State University, (1995); Stanislav Kreichi, "The ANS Synthesizer: Composing on a Photoelectronic Instrument," *Leonardo* 28, no. 1 (1995): 59-62.

³⁶ Jeremy Barham, "Scoring Incredible Futures: Science Fiction Screen Music, and 'Post-Modernism' as Romantic Epiphany," *The Musical Quarterly*, 91, 3-4 (2009): 240-274; Stefan Smith, "The edge of perception: sound in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*," *The Soundtrack* 1, no. 1 (2007): 41-52; James Wierzbicki, "The Imagined Sounds of Outer Space," *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 8 (2014): 1-37; James Wierzbicki, "Weird Vibrations: How the Theremin Gave Musical Voice to Hollywood's Extraterrestrial 'Others,'" *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 125-135.

³⁷ *Elektro Moskva*, Directed by Elena Tikhonova and Dominik Spritzendorfer, 2013, Austria: Rotor Film.

Analysis of science fiction films such as earlier, utopian releases like Valery Fokin's *The Sky Calls* (1959) and Pavel Klushantsev's *Planet of Storms* (1962) as well as later philosophical films such as Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and Konstantin Lopushansky's *Letters from a Dead Man* (1986) allows for insight into important aspects of cultural history and Soviet day-to-day life, as they touched upon important political and social problems of the time. Later science fiction films in particular, despite their futuristic or otherworldly settings, were often subversive, "anti-science" films at their roots, arguing that the search for the individual could not be found in the dogmatic quest for knowledge or the material. By disguising present day problems within an imagined future society, directors could avoid some degree of censorship. In this respect, I plan to address both the gap in the scholarship on Soviet science fiction film and Soviet youth subcultures outside of Western oriented trends and dissident activity. I will primarily draw on Yurchak's linguistic theory to discuss "unanticipated, alternate meanings" of officially proscribed culture and authoritative speech and propaganda related to the space race, and how these productions of the unreality of space and the future created a state-sanctioned form of escapism for many citizens through science fiction.

The first chapter will focus on the beginning of the Cold War and the Space Race, particularly Khrushchev's leadership and the Thaw, and the utopian themes in science fiction from this period. I will begin unpacking the construction of space myths in this era, discussing the role that visual propaganda, space education films, and early science fiction films played in reinforcing the "unreality" of events of the Space Race. Chapter two focuses on the events following the Space Race, the Brezhnev stagnation, Gorbachev's leadership, and *glasnost*. These major shifts in Soviet culture led to the popularity of dystopian themes and quest for self-discovery in science fiction film. The third chapter focuses on science fiction film scores, the

development of electronic music and electroacoustic instruments in the Soviet Union, and the popularity of this type of music alongside Western rock music.

This thesis will trace the shifting themes and narratives within science fiction, centering them in their historical context and studying how these films spoke to their audiences, maintaining relevance throughout the dramatic changes that the Soviet Union underwent. By exploring the cultural impact of science fiction film and electronic music, we can achieve a deeper understanding of Soviet subcultures that focused inward, to the “socially proscribed” pieces of entertainment, that ultimately unlocked the doors to worlds far outside the Imaginary West.

2 TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE: THE SPACE RACE AND UTOPIA IN SCIENCE FICTION FILMS OF THE 1950S AND 1960S

Space education and science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s were powerful contributors to the myth-making surrounding the Soviet space program. The myth-making within Soviet propaganda infused the events of the Soviet space program and the cosmonauts with a sense of unreality, inadvertently popularizing fictionalized representations of space travel and idealized socialist societies. Due to Nikita Khrushchev's emphasis on science and the Soviet successes in the space race, many Soviet citizens held a fascination with technology, outer space, and the future, and eagerly sought out science fiction literature and films.¹

The heroes of films from this era were often cosmonauts who were modeled after idealized versions of real life cosmonauts, but imbued with socialist cultural values, such as the New Soviet Man, an archetype of the ideal communist. Cosmonauts were presented by the Soviet state as the embodiment of Soviet technological might and ingenuity, as they were scientists who dutifully paved the way for expansion into space. These science fiction films emphasized the importance of collectivism—how the brave actions of the cosmonauts were advancing science for the Soviet Union and humanity, as the public looked on eagerly. Space as the setting for these films functioned as a sort of utopia, as it represented future expansion of knowledge and territory, and the success of communism. In this chapter I will discuss three films—*The Sky Calls* (1959), *Planet of Storms* (1962), and *Meeting a Dream* (1963)—that best demonstrate

¹ G. Altov, "Fantastika i chitatel'," *Problemy sotsiologii pechati*, vypusk 2 (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1970), 77.; Patrick L. McGuire, *Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 86-87; Sasha Raspopina, "Cult of the cosmic: How space travel became the unofficial religion of the USSR," *The Calvert Journal*, <http://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/4645>.

cinematically the values of the New Soviet Man and the popularization of science and technology during the Space Race.²

It is necessary to briefly explain why I have selected the films that I examine here. These films were selected based on the time period in which they were released and their participation in the discursive process of Soviet myth-making during the Space Race. I will focus on narrative analysis, in order to uncover the recurring tropes and values espoused by utopian science fiction film, and center it in the larger framework of scientific propaganda under Khrushchev.

Under Khrushchev's administration, a significant event occurred— literature underwent three major thaws, the first in 1953-4, the second in 1956, and the third in 1961.³ As mentioned above, a similar thaw occurred in the realm of film: a “new generation” of filmmakers began working in the film studios from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, “[changing] the face of Soviet cinema.”⁴ Although film did not confront Stalinism to the extent that writers, historians, and journalists did, filmmakers worked to undo the earlier glorification of Stalin within film. Ground-breaking authors such as Ilya Ehrenburg and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn “became landmarks in the emergence of new ethical and verbal standards of formulating experience,” by reinforcing the importance of individuality in their writings and resisting against the rigid linguistic restraints of Stalinism.⁵ Relaxed censorship allowed authors and artists to express their opinions more openly and led to a greater variety of literature and film. Coupled with a higher

²*The Sky Calls (Nebo Zovyot)*, Directed by Valery Fokin, 1959, U.S.S.R.: Dovzhenko Film Studios; *Planet of Storms (Planeta Bur)*, Directed by Pavel Klushantsev, 1962, U.S.S.R.: Lennauchfilm; *Meeting a Dream (Mechte Navstrechu)*, Directed by Mikhail Karyukov, 1963, U.S.S.R.: Odessa Film Studio.

For the sake of clarity, I am using the English titles throughout this paper. The original language titles are *Nebo Zovyot* or *Небо зовет* (1959), *Planeta Bur* or *Планета Бурь* (1962), and *Mechte Navstrechu* or *Мечте навстречу* (1963).

³ David Gillespie, “Thaws, Freezes and Wakes: Russian Literature, 1953-1991,” in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. Neil Cornwell (London: Routledge, 2001), 223.

⁴ Menashe, “Glasnost in the Soviet Cinema,” 30.

⁵ Denis Kozlov, *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, (Toronto: University of Canada Press, 2013), 9.

standard of living in the postwar period, many Soviet citizens had more leisure time in which to enjoy hobbies and to develop a social identity.

Long considered a powerful part of society, literature played an important role in this shaping of the individual. Literature had been a controversial topic under Stalin's leadership. Fearful that literary obscurity could mask dissident themes, the party deemed Socialist Realism as the "underlying ideology to all creative output," as it depicted everyday life in clear and straightforward terms.⁶ Film as well held a crucial role in the "education and molding of new Soviet citizens," targeting young people so that they would be "brought up [with]...a noble sense of love for their socialist motherland [and] devotion to the affairs of the Communist Party."⁷ Stalin considered science fiction in particular to be a dangerous genre, as it could easily conceal subversive elements. In the post-Stalin period, however, Khrushchev framed science as the means by which the Soviet Union could achieve "communist utopia."

As a result of both this literary and film thaw, the emphasis on scientific study, and the political climate during the Space Race, science fiction as a genre gained significant popularity from the 1950s to the dissolution of the Soviet Union among a wide variety of citizens, particularly among the young intelligentsia. Science not only "represented freedom from Stalinist superstition," but was a concrete means of building a socially and technologically advanced socialist society through "material-scientific achievements."⁸

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the majority of data on science fiction consumption focuses on literature; therefore, to understand the popularity of science fiction within the Soviet Union, it is necessary to examine data on readership as well as film viewership.

⁶ Natalia Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction: Soviet and American Science Fiction Films in the 1950s*, (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2013), 6.

⁷ Klimova, "Soviet Youth Films," 63-64.

⁸ Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., "Science Fiction and the Thaw," 338; Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Soviet Politics, and Literature*, (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 137.

A survey on science fiction readership from Baku, Azerbaijan in 1969-70 indicates that the genre was extremely popular among high school and university students, as well as scientists, white-collar workers, and writers and other literary people. Over half of those interviewed across all demographics read science fiction along with other genres, with 29.5% of schoolchildren through ninth grade, 27.6% of literary people, and 20% of physicists and engineers preferring science fiction to other genres. A survey of Moscow science fiction readership showed a larger percentage of readers who read science fiction in addition to other genres—university students were the lowest at 69% and journalists were the highest at 82%. Those who preferred science fiction to the exclusion of other genres was lower, between nine and 17%.⁹

Table 1: Preference for Science Fiction in Baku Poll. Source: Al'tov, "Fantastika," p. 79 and McGuire, Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction, p. 86.

Occupation	No.	Prefer sf to other genres		Read along with other genres		Prefer other genres	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Pupils (through 9 th grade)	88	26	29.5	56	63.7	6	6.8
Pupils (10 th grade)	96	8	8.3	58	59.1	32	32.6
Univ. students (sciences)	79	11	13.8	53	69.8	13	16.4
Univ. students (humanities and social sciences)	45	6	13.5	31	68.8	8	17.7
Physicists, engineers	100	20	20.0	66	66.0	14	14.0
Physicians, white collar workers	44	4	9.0	36	82.0	4	9.0
Literary people (sf-connected)	40	11	27.6	23	57.4	6	15.0

⁹ Altov, "Fantastika i chitatel'," 77.; McGuire, *Red Stars*, 86-87.

Table 2: Preference for Science Fiction in Moscow and Baku Polls (Comparison.)
Source: Klub, "Ot Moskvyy," p. 410, Table 1, and McGuire, Red Stars, p.87.

Occupation	Prefer sf (Moscow)	Prefer sf (Baku)	Read along with other (Moscow)	Read along with other (Baku)	Prefer other (Moscow)	Prefer other (Baku)
Pupils	17%	19%	72%	62%	11%	21%
Univ. students	17%	14%	69%	68%	14%	17%
Scientists	14%	20%	70%	66%	16%	14%
Writers*	16%		75%		11%	
Journalists*	9%		82%		9%	
Writers and journalists*	12%	28%	77%	57%	10%	15%

*Connected with science fiction.

One reason for this popularity is that science fiction lent itself easily to creating “myths of cosmic proportions,” encouraging citizens to look toward the future and celebrate “military feats and industrial success.”¹⁰ For those who were less than enamored with present life, science fiction enabled readers to imagine a world far away from the current one, where people had overcome major struggles and could work together to bring a greater, brighter society to the far reaches of the universe. This vision of a utopian future provided a pronounced and optimistic juxtaposition at a time when the Soviet people were working to overcome a conflicted past.

Despite its popularity, accessibility to books could be difficult. The problem of accessibility was largely attributed to the Soviet publishing industry; publishers were the “locus for most Soviet censorship.”¹¹ The Soviet Union also suffered from paper shortages, limiting the number of books published and subsequent reprintings.¹² In the 1970s and 1980s, one way that Soviet readers circumvented this problem was through the purchase of books on the black

¹⁰ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 7.

¹¹ McGuire, *Red Stars*, 3, 96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

market.¹³ Others shared books with friends, joined literature clubs, or visited cafes in order to trade or buy reading material.¹⁴ Film accessibility, at least in the cinema, was generally easier. As mentioned in the previous chapter, home viewing of films was uncommon until the late 1980s, but films were regularly released following Stalin's death, and film viewing was a common pastime.¹⁵

Although a handful of science fiction films were released in the Soviet Union prior to 1950, it was not until the late 1950s with the advent of the space race that the genre gained popularity. Earlier films like *Aelita*, *Queen of Mars* (1924) and *Cosmic Voyage* (1936) set the precedent of using science fiction films to reinforce communist ideology.¹⁶ In *Aelita*, the protagonist travels to a totalitarian regime on Mars and stages a proletarian revolution. Yet by the end of the film, the events that transpired are revealed to be a dream when the protagonist awakens. Thus, the film had a decidedly "anti-revolution" sentiment, according to the Soviet censors at the time. Stalin's officials denounced Fyodor Krasni, an animator who worked on *Cosmic Voyage*, stating that he "should have turned his talents to 'socialist realism.'"¹⁷ Despite the impact they had on later science fiction, both of these films fell out of favor with censors, and were difficult to view after their release.

As more academic material exists on science fiction literature instead of film, the history of censorship of the science fiction genre is more clearly traced through literature. Prior to the 1950s, officials maintained a firmer stance on science fiction literature and films, as the genre was "incongruous with state-approved socialist realism," and considered a "harmful distraction"

¹³ Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras*, (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 64.

¹⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 135-137, 141-146.

¹⁵ Shanker, "Soviets' VCRs Often Wrapped In Yards Of Red Tape."; Lubrano, "The Soviet Union," 20-21; Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 73.

¹⁶ *Aelita*, Directed by Yakov Protazanov, 1924, U.S.S.R.: Mezhrabpom-Rus; *Cosmic Voyage*, Directed by Vasili Zhuravlov, 1936, U.S.S.R.: Mosfilm.

¹⁷ Barker and Skotak, "Klushantsev," 80.

from the building of socialism.¹⁸ In 1953, following Stalin's death, science fiction publications increased significantly, with a slight increase in themes of spaceflight.¹⁹ Science fiction also became aligned with fictional stories about scientists and their work, which increased its popularity.²⁰ The loudest defenders of science fiction were primarily scientists and children's literature specialists. Although this designated the genre during the 1950s and to some extent into the 1970s and 1980s as "something read by schoolchildren and academicians," this support of science fiction by those outside the literary establishment led to increased publication.²¹

In terms of film censorship, many filmmakers dealt with excessive "hoop jumping" by censors who wanted them to make repeated changes to their screenplays. In her book *Moscow Prime Time*, Kristin Roth-Ey mentions one director who made six trips to Moscow in order to have his screenplay approved, and director Andrei Tarkovsky mentioned that authorities requested thirty-five separate changes to *Solaris*.²² The constraints of censors were an unavoidable part of filmmaking in the Soviet Union.

Pavel Klushantsev's space education films during the 1940s and 1950s impressed officials and enabled the release of science fiction films in the follow decades.²³ Many science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s framed their narratives as dreams or reinforced that they were merely a fictional imagining of the future in order to circumvent the demands of Socialist Realism in media censorship. The narratives of Khrushchev-era science fiction films featured heroic tales of cosmonauts rescuing those in peril and overcoming difficult trials with logic and

¹⁸ McGuire, *Red Stars*, 14; James Blackford, "Red Skies Soviet Science Fiction," *Sight & Sound* 21, no. 7 (July 2011).

¹⁹ McGuire, *Red Stars*, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²² Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 32.

²³ Barker and Skotak, "Klushantsev: Russia's Wizard of *Fantastika*," 78.

sacrifice during their missions into space, using the genre to reinforce space race propaganda instead of undermining communist ideology.

Within the dream-like quality of Soviet science fiction films from the 1930s through the 1960s are parallels to the idealized visual propaganda of the space race, reflecting the disconnect between daily life in the Soviet Union and the actual events of the Cold War versus the popular image of the space race. Space race propaganda was intended to reinforce established cultural myths surrounding socialism as well as inspire patriotism by using the space program as a focal point for national pride. Visual culture heavily reinforced historical myths that centered on both the cosmonauts and space dogs like Laika, whose flight on Sputnik 2 paved the way for space flight by other living creatures. Many of these visual propaganda depictions verged on fiction, through the carefully curated images of cosmonauts as almost superhero-like figures, fantastic wording of propaganda posters, and fairy tale imagery.

Adjusted to fit new official discourse, the myths surrounding Soviet science and the Soviet space program ultimately relied on foundational historical myths, like Marx and Lenin's philosophies and the heroism of the New Soviet Man. The concept of the New Soviet Man or New Soviet Person (*novy sovetsky chelovek*) originated in the 1920s as an archetype of the ideal communist. This archetype was intended to provide a role model for the Soviet people that unified the many nationalities and ethnicities across the newly formed Soviet Union. Described by Gerovitch as an ideal "citizen of the future communist state," the New Soviet Man was expected to embody moral, spiritual, and physical superiority.²⁴ This archetype was reified in the 1960s within the constructed public image of the cosmonauts. Through these myths, coupled

²⁴ Slava Gerovitch, *Soviet Space Mythologies*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 48; Slava Gerovitch, "'New Soviet Man' Inside Machine: Human Engineering, Spacecraft Design, and the Construction of Communism," *Osiris* 22, no. 1 (2007), 135; Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *Materialy XXII s'ezda KPSS* (Moscow, 1962), 411; Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, Vol II*, (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), 101-128.

with a pristine public image, the regime framed the cosmonauts as agents of change, and elevated them to an almost superhero-like status in the public eye. This can be observed in propaganda posters during the 1950s and 1960s. Boris Staris' 1961 painting of Yuri Gagarin, the first cosmonaut, uses the “fairy tale” rhetoric from the opening line of the *March of the Aviators*, stating “The fairy tale became truth.”²⁵ Gagarin holds a blue light in his hand like “a modern-day Prometheus,” bestowing upon him a larger than life quality.²⁶



Figure 1: Boris Staris, *The Fairy Tale Became Truth*, 1961, Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics, Moscow.

The space myth also extended to the space dogs that pioneered the way for humans. Olesya Turkina, author of *Soviet Space Dogs*, details the heroic feats of these animals, describing their public image and role in the Soviet Union as “the martyrs and saints of communism” and “the embodiment of a utopian consciousness, the ideal of a society that lived in the future, a

²⁵ Boris Staris, *The Fairy Tale Became Truth*, 1961, Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics, Moscow.

²⁶ “Posters of the golden age of Soviet cosmonauts,” *BBC News*, September 19, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34281621>.

society whose aim was to turn a fairy tale into reality.”²⁷ Unlike the cosmonauts, the space dogs had “no past, no background in the traditional sense of the word” that had to be overwritten. Thus, they were the ideal face of the Soviet space program in many ways. These dogs were suspended between the real and fantastic; their flights were commemorated in posters, educational films, postcards, stamps, even children’s books. Konstantin Ivanov’s 1960 painting depicts a man holding a miniature rocket containing Belka and Strelka, with the text “The path for humans is now cleared!” indicating the enormous role the dogs had in testing spacecraft, and thus enabling future space travel by humans.²⁸ In this respect, famous space dogs like Laika, Belka, and Strelka took on mythic proportions, as their images were disseminated across the nation in items that reached all citizens, adults and children alike.



Figure 2: Konstantin Ivanov, The Path for Humans Is Now Cleared, 1960, 87 x 58.5 cm, IZOGIZ, Moscow.

²⁷ Olesya Turkina, *Soviet Space Dogs*, (London: FUEL Publishing, 2014), 10.

²⁸ Konstantin Ivanov, *The Path for Humans Is Now Cleared*, 1960, 87 x 58.5 cm, IZOGIZ, Moscow.

The fairy tale theme extended to inanimate objects as well—a 1959 postcard by I.M. Semenov, “linking fact with fiction,” depicts five fairy tale characters, such as Baba Yaga on her broomstick, chasing after Sputniks 1 and 2. The text on the postcard reads “Catch them if you can?!” implying that the technology of the future was far faster than even magical transport.²⁹ The language and imagery of these pieces reinforced the fantastic nature of the Space Age. Infused with a sense of unreality and driven by a desire for literature and film, the myth-making within the Soviet space program spurred citizens to refashion these myths into science fiction narratives.

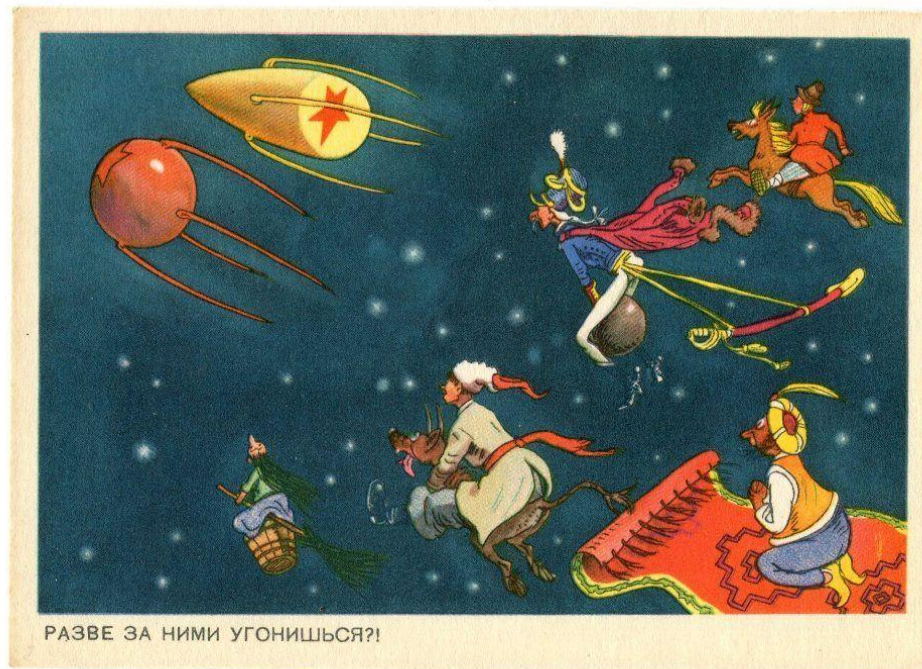


Figure 3: I.M. Semenov. “Catch them if you can?!” 1959.

Although many of these propaganda posters had a wider distribution and greater ease of access to ordinary people than science fiction films, the themes within both these posters and films are similar. Both functioned within the same realm of national identity and ideology, using

²⁹ Turkina, *Soviet Space Dogs*, 24-25; I.M. Semenov, “Catch them if you can?!” 1959.

heroic imagery for the figures within the posters and characters within films, reinforcing extant cultural myths such as the New Soviet Man. Science fiction films of the Khrushchev-era took these ideas further with the means of narrative, film scores, and characterization, blending these elements to create a “space epic” subgenre within science fiction.

The utopian and collectivist impulses of Soviet cinema from the 1950s and 1960s illustrate the values put forward by socialism at this time, serving as a juxtaposition to the United States and capitalism. These ideas are described by Voinova as a type of “white man’s burden,” in which the Soviet people must take it upon themselves to rescue those who are not living in socialist utopia. Historian Iina Kohonen argues that this utopianism reached its height in 1961, with Gagarin’s space flight. Visual propaganda depicted a world of “beautiful, smiling people” who were “the children of the new era, the age of Space.”³⁰ This portrayal contradicted with the present reality of Cold War conflicts and internal struggle during the Thaw; the “decentralization of production and education” brought about by Khrushchev’s reforms led to inefficiency and scarcity in the economy, and catastrophic droughts during the 1950s forced the Soviet Union to import grain from Western Europe to combat famine.³¹

The dual existence between the present and the imagined future further contributed to deterritorialization, creating a disconnect in the minds of Soviet citizens between the optimistic facade of socialism espoused by propaganda, and the realities of day-to-day life.³² Science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s envisioned similar futures: heroic, goal-oriented scientists and cosmonauts, who possessed advanced technology in order to enter space to rescue those in need or further scientific goals by exploring the unknown; cooperation or at least limited hostility between countries; the Soviet Union (or the entire world) was a clean, orderly, and modern

³⁰ Iina Kohonen, “The space race and Soviet utopian thinking,” *Sociological Review* 57, no. s1 (2009): 115.

³¹ Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., “Science Fiction and the Thaw,” 339.

³² Kohonen, “The space race,” 115.

communist paradise. This imagined future stood in sharp contrast to the conditions of the Cold War during the 1950s and 1960s, when both the USSR and the US were engaged in fierce competition, and the Soviet Union was still recovering from the devastating effects of World War II and Stalinism. The “fairy tale” or fantastic imagery and rhetoric within visual propaganda, the usage of imaginative ideas about the future in science fiction film, and the emphasis on myth-making within “factual” space education films served to create an image of outer space and the Soviet Union’s achievements that was, in large part, fantasy. Yet, this unreality of space propaganda and its encouragement of the creation of fantastic worlds led to science fiction as a popular genre, as Soviet citizens were drawn to these fictional spaces as a shelter from present day problems.

While literature of the 1960s and later films during the 1970s and 1980s focused on social problems and dystopian futures, films of the 1950s and 1960s showed a utopian future and largely reinforced the party line. In her book *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, Natalia Voinova undertakes a comparative analysis between Soviet and American science fiction films, by focusing on the political events surrounding these films and the subsequent impact on their narratives. As a result of the Space Race, science-focused plots increased in both countries. Young people were the largest consumers of science fiction, although the genre experienced significant popularity among a diverse group of people in the Soviet Union, as is echoed in the readership polls from Moscow and Baku.³³ Cold War fears did not reach the same height in the USSR as they did in the USA, yet science fiction in both the East and the West was undeniably focused on social and political problems. Voinova argues that film, particularly science fiction film, is inherently political, as it examines “contemporary problems through the lens of

³³ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 1; Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Soviet Politics, and Literature*, (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 137.

impossible events,” and is also a means through which one can explore the “scientific stand-off” between the United States and the Soviet Union. Science fiction is also a valuable means of understanding the Soviet Union, as it “uniquely demands for an imaginative view of the future” which aligns with the “future-oriented ideology” of Marxism-Leninism.³⁴ As a genre, science fiction allowed Soviet citizens to look toward the future, envisioning both the worker’s paradise that could be achieved through the building of communism, and the Soviet Union’s triumph over the United States in the space race.

Notable for setting the thematic stage of Khrushchev-era science fiction film was the 1959 film *The Sky Calls*. Released two years after the launch of Sputnik 1 and two years before Gagarin’s famous flight, the film is straight-forward in its narrative and simple in its characterization. It centers on the Soviet-American race into space, where Mars is the objective instead of the moon. *The Sky Calls* was framed as pure speculation and was set in an indeterminate future, where manned spaceflight is possible. The story opens with a science fiction novelist’s visit to a scientist at the “Rocket Institute” in order to research rocket propulsion and spaceflight. After the meeting, the author falls asleep and dreams up a tale where the Soviet Union is preparing their first manned flight to Mars.

At a space station orbiting the Earth, the cosmonauts are waiting for the rest of their team when they notice the American ship *Typhoon* also heading to Mars, in an effort to beat the Soviet cosmonauts. There is a short scene in which the Americans speak with the media, saying that nothing will stop their victory, interspersed with images of city streets in the United States, with neon lights and flashing billboards for movie theatres and brand names such as Budweiser. The gaudy images of consumer culture and arrogance of the Americans is a stark contrast with the simpler, work-centered images of the Soviet Union and matter-of-fact nature of the Soviet

³⁴ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*.

cosmonauts. In their haste, the Americans did not plan accordingly, and the *Typhoon* soon goes off course. It is up to the cosmonauts to rescue the Americans, which they do at great risk to themselves.



Figure 4: City streets in the United States; The Sky Calls, USSR, 1959, Valery Fokin.

Both the Americans and the Soviets end up marooned on an asteroid without fuel to return home. They are ultimately saved by a cosmonaut who pilots a fuel rocket to them, sacrificing himself in the process, as the rocket is not intended to be flown by a pilot and does not have adequate shielding from solar radiation. The author awakens at the end, and presents his manuscript to the scientists at the Rocket Institute. He ends the film with a short speech, stating that man has “mastered the cosmos,” and wishes luck to the young generation in their efforts to explore the stars.



Figure 5: Mars rises over the asteroid; The Sky Calls, USSR, 1959, Valery Fokin.

The future envisioned in this film was a positive one. Although the conflict between the Soviets and the Americans was explored, the Soviets were depicted as benevolent, altruistic, and willing to risk their lives to help those who are in need. They abandon their mission to Mars, as the rescue of those in peril is more important than “winning” the race. The Americans did not pose a considerable threat to the Soviets, but rather did not think through their plans adequately in their haste to get to Mars. The Americans can be viewed as immature or childish; they undertake a mission without considering the consequences, and must be rescued by those who are more knowledgeable and capable. This was likely a reflection of the Soviet perspective on the Space Race during this time. While the Soviet goal allegedly focused on the greater good for society, they viewed Americans as more competitive and focused instead on “winning” the race.

The names of the spacecraft within *The Sky Calls* were also an important part of the narrative. The space station where the story begins was named *Friendship*, implying a future of cooperation between nations. While the American spaceship was the *Typhoon*, suggesting a chaotic, destructive force, the Russian spaceship was called *Motherland*, symbolizing its patriotic

mission, and dedication “to the people and the utilitarian idea.”³⁵ The Soviet people are working toward a utopian, idealistic future, while the hasty and overly competitive actions of the Americans place others in danger.

Although framed as a fantastic tale, the moralistic nature of the film imbues it with a fairy tale-like quality. The story is straight-forward, and the development of the characters is basic, as they exist merely to further the narrative, with their actions clearly delineated into appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The closing words of the author at the end of the film instruct young people to be heroic and self-sacrificing for the greater good. This final statement indicates who the intended audience was—Soviet youth. The socialist lessons directed toward young people and encouragement to pursue scientific endeavors rendered *The Sky Calls* unthreatening as well as valuable for its instructive qualities, thus enabling the release of successive science fiction films.

The early 1960s were a time of significant political and social upheaval within the Soviet Union, and this is reflected in the themes discussed in Pavel Klushantsev’s *Planet of Storms* (1962). Originally a leading director of space education films, Klushantsev contributed heavily to a fictionalized public image of space by combining both factual elements and speculative fiction. Khrushchev’s strong emphasis on both education and technology during the Space Race led to the increase in science education films, and in particular space education films, which were another medium that was geared toward Soviet youth. Klushantsev released a number of space education films from the late 1940s through the 1960s, one of the most significant being his 1957 film *Road to the Stars*. Released the same year that Sputnik 1 was launched and “acting on instructions from film bureaucrats in Moscow,” *Road to the Stars* includes model footage of the

³⁵ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 26.

Sputnik satellite.³⁶ While the first half discusses factual topics such as space flight and rocket propulsion, the second half is purely fiction, predicting flight to the moon, space stations, and the prospect of a lunar colony.

The inclusion of speculative fiction with scientific fact was a common theme in his later space education films as well – his 1965 film *Luna* and his 1968 film *Mars* also combine fact with fiction. The first half of *Luna* discusses established scientific fact, such as the temperature of the lunar surface, but the second half veers into fiction with proposed lunar cities. *Mars* contains a similar format: after explaining conditions on the planet and debating whether there may still be life on Mars, it depicts exploration and colonization of Mars, suggesting that this may be possible in the near future. In 1962, Klushantsev broke from his tradition of space education filmmaking by releasing his own science fiction film, *Planet of Storms*, which was remarkable at the time for depicting weightlessness with realistic special effects, likely due to the director's work on educational films. Although the tale is overall a humorous one, this film is also remarkable for avant-garde aspects of its plot and characterization, and a valuable medium through which to observe political viewpoints from this time period on topics that varied from relations with the West to cybernetics to gender.

As is the case with *The Sky Calls*, *Planet of Storms* clearly framed the story as fantasy in an effort to avoid questioning by the censors. The film opens with a disclaimer about the story which follows—it states that there is little scientific knowledge of Venus, so “only one’s imagination can peek into this explored world.”³⁷ It acknowledges that the depiction of Venus is likely not realistic, so as not to make assumptions before Soviet science had actually uncovered the truth, but states that “we believe in the feat of the Soviet people who will be able to see the

³⁶ *Road to the Stars*, Directed by Pavel Klushantsev, 1957, U.S.S.R.: Lennauchfilm.; Blackford, “Red Skies.”

³⁷ *Planeta Bur*, Dir. Klushantsev, 1962.

Planet of Storms with their own eyes,” optimistically implying that one day Soviet cosmonauts will indeed travel to Venus. It is worth noting that this film was released a year after both the February 1961 launch of the Venera-1 probe, the first spacecraft to fly by Venus, as well as Yuri Gagarin’s orbital flight, placing both exploration of Venus and manned missions beyond Earth into the forefront of popular depictions of outer space.

The film opens with three spaceships, *Vega*, *Sirius*, and *Capella*, who are heading to Venus on a Soviet-American collaborative expedition. After the *Capella* is hit by an asteroid and destroyed, *Vega* and *Sirius* must wait in orbit around Venus for a replacement ship, the *Arcturus*, to arrive, as the mission requires three ships – two will descend to the surface of the planet while the third remains in orbit to monitor their progress. The cosmonauts mourn the loss of their comrades, and what the delay will mean for their expedition. Ultimately, they grow bored with waiting, as the *Arcturus* will not arrive for two months, and decide that an attempt at exploration is better than doing nothing. The *Vega* is equipped with a glider, and they suggest sending Allan Kern’s talking robot Iron John to the surface, but a cosmonaut on the *Sirius*, Alyosha, insists that he can accomplish more than a “hunk of steel” and that Venus must be seen with human eyes. While the crew of the *Sirius* debates sending Alyosha, Ivan Shcherba, the geologist, and Allan, the sole American astronaut and his invention Iron John, instead choose to descend to the surface in the glider. The *Sirius* lands shortly after, while Masha Ivanova remains in orbit in the *Vega*.

Shortly after their landing, contact is lost between the three parties: Masha in the *Vega*, the crew of the *Sirius*, and Ivan and Allan. Isolated from the others, Masha struggles with the decision to land the *Vega* to help her comrades and potentially strand them in the process should she encounter a problem, or remain in orbit and wait to regain contact. On Venus, the cosmonauts must face both hostile creatures and a hostile environment in their efforts to find one

another. The planet is covered with jungle-like plant growth and rivers of lava, and populated by dinosaurs and other prehistoric beasts. This can be interpreted as an allegory for Soviet people coming together despite opposition from outside forces, displaying strength and concern for their fellows in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, the cosmonauts on Venus remain optimistic, and curious about the world around them. While they may have disobeyed official orders to descend to Venus, they never break from their roles as scientists.



Figure 6: The cosmonauts on Venus; Planet of Storms, USSR, 1962, Pavel Klushantsev.

Their disobedience seems out of place in a film that strongly reinforces the value of collectivism. The cosmonauts do not do anything to undermine their government; instead, their actions are rooted in a desire to work harder, as they were not content with inactivity, and in an effort to progress science by learning about an unexplored planet. Before descending to Venus, they discussed how risk is an inevitable part of science. Unlike the Americans in *The Sky Calls*, they believe that they do not require rescue, and, in the words of Alyosha, their lives are their

own if they choose to risk them. This reinforced the heroic aspects of the cosmonauts, as well as playing into the trope of sacrifice that was common in these films.

In contrast to American films, which commonly feature a monster, alien, or other type of outside invading force against which they must defend, Soviet films at this time generally “disregard dystopia as a Western decadence, and avoid apocalyptic scenarios unless they occur on alien planets in need of rescue from Soviet cosmonauts.”³⁸ *Planet of Storms* largely does not break from this trope; the overall tone is positive and features teamwork to overcome all odds. There is not an invading force in the sense of an American science fiction film, such as the prehistoric beast in *King Kong* (1933) or the hideous aliens in *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), that land on American soil and must be fought off. The opposition the cosmonauts face is ultimately one of their own choosing; it is a risk that they understood they would be taking by exploring an uncharted planet.

One theme shared by both Soviet and American science fiction films from this time, however, is the “man versus man” narrative reframed as “man versus nature.” Unlike *The Sky Calls*, the Americans cannot be the instigators in *Planet of Storms*, as their mission is a collaborative one between Americans and Soviets. Instead, the conflict is portrayed as forces outside the cosmonauts’ control—the asteroid that destroys *Capella*, the Venusian flora and fauna, and technical difficulties. Yet, by delving beneath the surface, the “savage” environment in which they are immersed is a metaphor for the capitalistic Western powers. This portrayal of outside forces as environmental insinuates them to be natural, implying further that the natural state of the human individual is capitalistic and exploitative, and a product of humanity’s basic and most primal instincts.

³⁸ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 23.

Underneath these larger and more overt narrative themes of conflict with the West and the heroism of the cosmonauts are commentaries on shifts in scientific study under Khrushchev's leadership, and evolving gender roles as women entered male-dominated professions in larger numbers. These topics are explored in the characterization of Allan's robot, Iron John, and Masha, the lone female cosmonaut.

Allan's robot is one of the more interesting figures in the film, as he represents a larger debate on cybernetics within Soviet science. Within the film, the American astronaut, Allan, is picked by the International Association to accompany the cosmonauts on the flight in order to test his invention, Iron John. The robot is whimsically named after the wild man with skin like iron in the Grimm's fairy tale. Iron John is similar in appearance to Robby the Robot from the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*—tall and bulbous, with a glass dome like a cosmonaut's helmet for a head and pincer-like claws for hands. Iron John differs from Robby in that he is more angular, and has claws for feet instead of circular shoes.

By the 1960s, the Soviet government no longer denounced the field of cybernetics as "bourgeois pseudoscience," yet many still considered the field suspect.³⁹ For instance, the lone American on the mission is the owner of the robot and the cybernetics expert. Allan's Soviet colleagues appear to trust him and are able to rely on him in the film, but the cosmonauts are not as accepting of Iron John. Alyosha's objection to sending Iron John alone to the surface and insistence that Venus must be seen with human eyes implies that a human can do work better than a robot, and workers should not be easily replaced by automatons.

Although Iron John does assist the cosmonauts on many occasions, he is not without certain flaws, suggesting that robots may not be as promising as Western science believes. He is

³⁹ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 29; Kevin T. Baker, "Red Helmsman: Cybernetics, Economics, and Philosophy in the German Democratic Republic," Master's Thesis, Georgia State University (2011), 22.

comedic and bumbling in his portrayal; at one point, the cosmonauts are trying to communicate with the robot, but he is immobile and plays jazz music instead. One man remarks to the other that Iron John will only obey if you ask him nicely. In this sense, the robot can be interpreted as a reflection of the United States. While the United States cooperates with the Soviet Union in this imagined future, the relationship they shared in the 1960s, like the Soviet Union's relationship to cybernetics, was a more tenuous one. The robot refuses to cooperate on more than one occasion, instead resorting to frivolous actions like the playing of jazz music. Iron John's broadcasting of jazz frequently happens throughout the film, often at inopportune times. This type of music is also relevant; American jazz had a conflicted place in Soviet official discourse. Between the 1940s and 1970s, the government's stance fluctuated between praising jazz as originating "in the creative genius of the slaves and working people," and condemning it as "bourgeois pseudo-art."⁴⁰ The same can be applied to cybernetics.

Despite these shortcomings, the original intention for Iron John in this expedition is to remain behind on Venus, as the *Sirius* can only take five back, and the glider cannot return to orbit. He ultimately redeems himself at the end by helping Allan and Ivan across lava and destroying himself in the process, thus invoking the trope of sacrifice for the greater good. The two men are able to join their comrades, and return to the *Vega* ship at the end. Throughout their exploration on Venus, the cosmonauts heard the voice of a woman but could not find the source. In the closing scene of the film, a mysterious figure on Venus is reflected in a pool, suggesting that humanoid life does indeed exist beyond Earth, and a patriotic song promises that one day spaceships will return to the planet of storms.

⁴⁰ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 165.

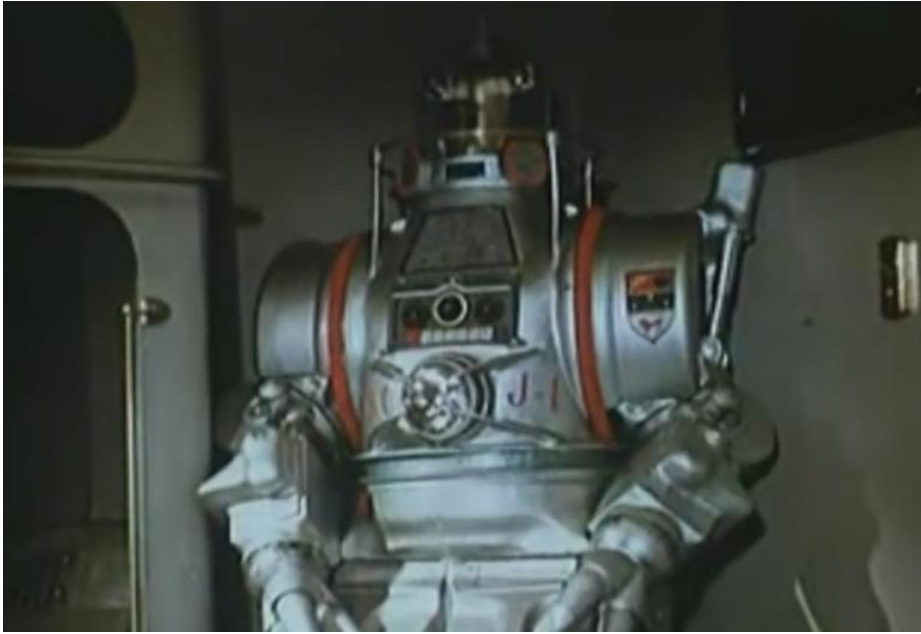


Figure 7: The robot Iron John; Planet of Storms, USSR, 1962, Pavel Klushantsev.

Like Iron John, Masha, the cosmonaut who remains behind on the *Vega*, also experiences a type of sacrifice. While she is the only one who could process the information sent by her colleagues and transmit information to Earth, she regrets that she is left behind. When first told that she would be the one to stay back, she says, with tears in her eyes, that she “hoped it would be different,” and she worked very hard to go on this mission, only to be denied the first-hand view of Venus. She mentions Sputnik and going to the moon, implying that she worked on these missions as well. Ivan tells her that they must send the robot, as the International Association requires it, and that he must also see Venus. She asks, “Don’t I have to?” but Ivan does not grant her a response; he pats her on the arm, and the scene ends. In this respect, her sacrifice can be interpreted as the sacrifice of many women in science – although they work very hard to prove themselves, they are often denied opportunities that are given to their male colleagues.

Her portrayal was particularly relevant for the 1960s, as women’s roles changed and evolved following Stalin’s death. This was not unique; gender roles had been in flux since the establishment of the USSR. In the 1920s and 1930s, Marxist feminism reshaped gender roles as a

break from bourgeois images of womanhood. This entailed the equality of women and men along with an updated “cult of domesticity,” in which women were expected to maintain their roles as “supportive wives and nurturing mothers” who instilled socialist values in their children. By the 1930s the emancipation of Soviet women was widespread. They gained better access to education, social services, and a greater variety of professions, although men were still more likely to hold leadership positions. This shifted under Stalin’s leadership, eventually leading to a “neoconservative socialist patriarchy,” in which a woman’s domestic role became more important than her civic one.⁴¹ Many women across the Eastern Bloc struggled with this “double burden” of domestic life and an occupation; this emphasis on domesticity and motherhood “remained more or less unchallenged” until the dissolution of the USSR.⁴² Although still saddled with restrictive gender roles, women in the USSR nevertheless had greater freedom in regards to education and choice of occupation than women in the West during the same time period.

The history of women in science in the Soviet Union is difficult to untangle.⁴³ There were many female scientists in the Soviet Union; however, their experiences were not distinguished from male perspectives or largely overlooked, as there “was no ‘woman’s question’ in the USSR.”⁴⁴ It was much easier, on the surface, for women to begin a scientific career in the Soviet Union than in many Western countries, as they were granted access to universities starting in 1918; however, they often did not have the sphere of influence necessary to gain funding or to secure scientific research, and many were not considered as capable as male scientists.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Yoshie Mitsuyoshi, “Public Representations of Women in Western Ukraine under Late Stalinism: Magazines, Literature, and Memoirs,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 54, no. 1 (2006), 20.

⁴² Pavla Vesela, “The Hardening of ‘Cement’: Russian Women and Modernization,” *NWSA Journal*, 15, no. 3 (Autumn, 2003), 107.

⁴³ In fact, until the 1990s Russian historiography neglected this topic, and the majority of research was by Western scholars.

⁴⁴ Olga Valkova, “The Conquest of Science: Women and Science in Russia, 1860-1940,” *Osiris*, 23 (2008), 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

The fact that Klushantsev grants her a voice is important; the film is forward-thinking in its characterization. Masha does not remain behind cheerfully, nor is the action entirely focused on the male characters after this point. Klushantsev shows her reactions to the news that she will have to remain in orbit, and shows her in subsequent scenes as she struggles between choosing to land the *Vega* to find her colleagues or waiting until they can re-establish contact. Despite her curiosity toward seeing Venus and her dismay at being left behind, Masha ultimately remains in place, never straying from her duty. In this sense, Masha embodies female Soviet cultural values such as loyalty, duty, and self-sacrifice, and displays the same strength and regard for the well-being of her colleagues as the male cosmonauts. Yet, her role is largely a domestic one. The ship is their headquarters while studying Venus, and can be read as their “home” away from Earth. Masha must dutifully wait there until the men return from their adventuring.



Figure 8: Masha; Planet of Storms, USSR, 1962, Pavel Klushantsev.

The topics examined in *Planet of Storms* were important ones for their time period. Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, completed her famous flight the year following

Planet of Storms' release. Her flight, however, was merely for propaganda purposes; another female cosmonaut did not go into space until the 1980s.⁴⁶ Klushantsev depicted the characters cleverly, discussing scientific and cultural problems within the figures of Iron John and Masha. He broke from traditional science fiction tropes by reinterpreting them in unusual ways. The two misunderstood and downtrodden figures, Masha and Iron John, sacrifice themselves not only for the greater good, but because they have no choice; society has already placed their value below that of the male cosmonauts. Overall, however, these issues do not give the film a dour feel; *Planet of Storms* generally maintains a positive mood throughout its narrative. Klushantsev explores heavier topics in the same way that the cosmonauts explore Venus: light-heartedly and with a sense of humor.

As the 1960s progressed, science fiction films became more layered in their meaning and use of propaganda. Like *The Sky Calls* and *Planet of Storms*, the film *Meeting a Dream* (1963) was optimistic and utopian in its telling. Story-wise, *Meeting a Dream* had more in common with *The Sky Calls* in many ways than *Planet of Storms*, as it features a tale of heroic cosmonauts venturing into space and rescuing those in peril, within the larger framework of an instructive tale. This was likely due in part to its director Mikhail Karyukov, who also produced *The Sky Calls*.

The story opens much like a science education film. An artist's painting of the Earth from space is shown, and the narrator states that from this distance, it looks much like a "school globe." The narrator talks about the variety of people who live on Earth, from "fishermen to poets, to schoolboys and cosmonauts," while images of men parachuting and swimmers diving are displayed, as if reminding the viewer of the unique things that Earth has to offer – water and

⁴⁶ Lance K. Erickson, "Space Flight: History, Technology, and Operations," (Lanham, MD: Government Institutes, 2010), 601.

breathable air. The narrator then introduces the team of cosmonauts, who are enjoying a pleasant day; two of them are playing chess, one draws by himself, another is spending time with his family. The first few are depicted as ordinary people, in casual clothing and doing activities that many people enjoy. As the introductions continue, some of the team is shown at work. One of these figures is Krylov, the head astronomer at the scientific center, who is meeting with a “foreign colleague” of his, Mr. Laungton.

This meeting both introduces the story while also reinforcing the utopianism of the film. Krylov and Laungton have a dispute, in which they debate what will happen when the people of Earth meet an alien race. Krylov believes the alien people will be friendly, while Laungton believes they will be hostile. This stands in juxtaposition to the positive mood of the film. While their dispute is good-natured, Laungton’s ideas are meant to evoke the belligerent and competitive nature of the West; his foreign-sounding name as well as his introduction as a “foreign colleague” suggest this. Aside from these characters, the other nations of the planet appear to be in cooperation with one another.

The only female cosmonaut, Tanya, receives a strange signal from space, which is later discovered to have come from a planet called Centuria. The “greatest and most beautiful event in the universe happened” – the Centurions have heard broadcasts from Earth and set out to discover the source of the sound. Unfortunately, they encounter problems and become marooned on Phobos. The team of cosmonauts must go to their rescue, without truly knowing what will happen when they meet the mysterious Centurions, but believing that they must be benevolent.

Throughout the film, we hear a song about exploring the universe that is interspersed with the narration. Andrei, the cosmonaut, wrote the song for Tanya. The song contains a repeating lyric about apple trees flowering on Mars, contributing to its dreamlike quality. The

tone of the song reflects the emotions within a given scene, varying from wistful, when the cosmonauts are reminiscing or in the midst of sentimental moment, to patriotic and triumphant, when they are on their mission.

The first encounter with the foreign cosmonaut on Phobos is slightly eerie; however, the cosmonauts still approach the shadowy figure, and when she stumbles, they do not hesitate to catch her. They discover that she is one of the cosmonauts from Centuria. In order to bring her to Earth, they must leave one of their crew behind, the cosmonaut Andrei, as their ship can only hold so many people. Yet, he accepts this duty, even though he will die. Tanya, his lover, mourns his death, speaking to him over the radio until one of the other cosmonauts returns and takes the microphone from her. Instead of reporting to the government or ground control first, he immediately announces the finding of a foreign cosmonaut to the people of Earth, through a global intercom system. At the end of his speech, he states triumphantly, “You were wrong, Mr. Laungton!” as the alien woman is benevolent, just as Krylov and the cosmonauts believed all along.

The final scene depicts the crowd on Earth who is watching the video feed of the Centurion woman on a huge screen, which then fades back to the scene of the cosmonauts in the introduction. Tanya wipes her eyes as she talks to Andrei, reflecting that they only spent one hour in his dreams, but that others are “singing these songs about the universe” in reality, and will continue to do so. The film is open-ended, suggesting that these adventures are awaiting the viewers now and in the future.

Meeting a Dream boasts an impressive set and beautiful cinematography. The contrast between the shots of Earth and the images of the Centurions’ planet and spaceship are significant. Earth is always depicted as bright and the scenes of the crowd show magnificent

architecture and statues. On the other hand, the Centurions' planet and spaceship are shown as dark and almost eerie, and the Centurions themselves are never shown speaking to either the cosmonauts or each other. This contrast reinforces the mysterious nature of the alien race; yet, unlike many American movies that feature an invading "other" with which people are incapable of communicating, the muteness of the Centurions is not shown as hostile, nor are they depicted as irrational or unreasonable. Instead, the darkness and lack of communication suggests mystery, and to keep the viewers "in the dark" on the true nature of the Centurions before they are revealed as benevolent.



Figure 9: The Centurions on their spaceship; Meeting a Dream, USSR, 1963, Mikhail Karyukov.



Figure 10: The planet Centuria; *Meeting a Dream*, USSR, 1963, Mikhail Karyukov.

The overall message of these films is an uplifting, future-oriented one. All suggest that travel beyond the Earth is possible, and will be accomplished through the heroic, collaborative efforts of the people on Earth. All feature a character sacrificing himself in order to help the rest of the team succeed. There is rarely a single person sacrificing him or herself in exchange for the life of another; the character frequently acts to save the lives of many, reinforcing the collectivist spirit in these films. All three films frame the events of the story as a dream, or as a fictional imagining of what events might transpire. The enemies in these films, if there truly is one, vary significantly; the conflict is frequently natural phenomena outside human control, such as an unexplored planet, or problems with space travel.

The topic of Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union is typically touched upon, although the extent to which it is featured in the plot varies widely. *Meeting a Dream* only briefly discusses this conflict, as portrayed in the dispute between Krylov

and Laungton on whether an alien race will be friendly or hostile. Laungton is not specifically stated to be American, however, although it can be inferred that he represents Western thought to some degree. While *The Sky Calls* depicts Americans as self-serving and *Planet of Storms* shows the Soviet Union and the United States working together with relative success, neither film portrayed Americans as evil or monstrous, or seeking to destroy the Soviet Union from the inside. At worst, the Americans were not depicted as “radically evil,” but merely deluded by their capitalist government. This perhaps suggests that they are redeemable and may one day be open to socialist ideology. In the same vein, faraway planets may have dangerous flora and fauna, but there were no giant monsters or aliens that threaten mankind in Soviet narratives. Unlike a monster, Soviet people are often able to reason with the Americans, or with the Centurions in *Meeting a Dream*.⁴⁷ Rather, the beast is capitalism, and it is up to the Soviet Union to rescue those who have been subjugated by it. Economics, although created by man, is in itself a force of nature, and likewise is not easily contained or controlled, much like Frankenstein's monster.

⁴⁷ Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 25.

3 SEEKING THE LIGHT IN THE DARK: STAGNATION AND DYSTOPIA IN SCIENCE FICTION FILMS OF THE 1970S AND 1980S

While earlier films created a foundation for later science fiction to build upon, political or propagandizing themes took precedence over philosophical, introspective themes or the search for self that characterized films of the 1970s and 1980s. In the works of directors who came of age during the 1950s and the 1960s who created dystopian films or films which attempted to discover a sense of self, we can observe a larger trend of disillusionment and alienation among Soviet youth. Young people were the majority of viewers and readers of science fiction, and, as historian Roth-Ey suggests, young viewers in particular could influence the Soviet film industry.¹ The optimism professed by earlier science fiction films did not adequately speak to young people, nor were they indicative of life as it truly was within the Soviet Union. Coupled with the problems in the government and economy that were becoming apparent during the Brezhnev stagnation era, many Soviet youths turned to these fantastic worlds as both an escape and an answer to their need for individuality.

This chapter discusses four films: *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979) by Andrei Tarkovsky, and *Letters from a Dead Man* (1986) and *Visitor to a Museum* (1989) by Konstantin Lopushansky.² Through the futuristic settings of their films, these two directors in particular examined problems within modern day Soviet society, which ranged from the search for identity and individualism to dealing with the aftermath of nuclear war. In contrast to the films of the 1950s and 1960s, the protagonists of Tarkovsky's films are not idealized heroes, such as

¹ Altov, "Fantastika i chitatel'," 77; McGuire, *Red Stars*, 86-87; Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 73.

² *Solaris*, Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972, U.S.S.R.: Mosfilm Studios, 2002; *Stalker*, Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979, U.S.S.R.: Mosfilm Studios; *Letters from a Dead Man*, Directed by Konstantin Lopushansky, 1986, U.S.S.R.: Lenfilm; *Visitor to a Museum*, Directed by Konstantin Lopushansky, 1989, U.S.S.R.: Lenfilm.

The original language titles are *Солярис* (1972), *Сталкер* (1979), *Письма Мёртвого Человека* or *Письма мёртвого человека* (1986), and *Посетитель Музея* or *Посетитель музея* (1989).

scientists or cosmonauts; instead, they are ordinary and flawed men. Lopushansky's use of religious motifs are both a criticism of the suppression of religion within the Soviet Union and reflective of the director's own beliefs. These later films explore philosophical themes instead of propagandizing ones, arguing for a search of self within the intangible, in a world beyond the everyday lives of citizens. Narratives no longer focused on adventure stories about the heroic actions of cosmonauts; instead, stories explored themes of human emotion, relationships, the impact of humanity on the planet, the dangers of science and technology taken too far rather than the glory it could bring the Soviet Union. In this regard, both directors draw from their own experiences of suppressed identity, and, in doing so, appeal to the changing desires of audiences. Their films break down earlier tropes of heroism, selfless sacrifice, and ideological goals in Soviet science fiction cinema, and examine deeper problems in society instead of merely providing a light-hearted adventure story.

For all the social, cultural, and technological advancements made by the Khrushchev administration, young people during this era reported feeling “bored, unchallenged and depressed.”³ Despite increased stability and liberalization, the tedium of daily life left little space for “interesting and creative work.” Historian Jeremi Suri attributes this dissatisfaction to a “classical dilemma” that afflicted the educated population during more liberal time periods, in which “gradual, controlled reforms” inevitably led to a “flood of demands for broader change.”

Brezhnev adopted a policy of “developed socialism,” in which he sought to preserve the status quo. Under his leadership, the liberalization of Khrushchev was halted, and Soviet society became “deeply conservative and risk-averse” from 1964 to 1972. A major part of this policy involved trade of Soviet natural resources for manufactured goods from Western countries,

³ Jeremi Suri, “The Promise and Failure of ‘Developed Socialism’: The Soviet ‘Thaw’ and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964-1972,” *Contemporary European History* 15, no. 2 (May 2006), 137.

primarily Western Europe, subsequently making “socialism dependent on capitalism” and impeding the Eastern Bloc’s manufacturing and technological development.⁴

Following the events of the Prague Spring and Soviet invasion in 1968, open protest lessened and “public disillusion became more palpable” throughout the Eastern Bloc.⁵ Soviet citizens grew apathetic as they felt that they could do little to effect change, and as a result, did not feel compelled to “endorse additional sacrifices” for the party. Soviet society settled into both an economic and social stagnation (*zastoi*).⁶

Many Russians remembered the Brezhnev era as a ‘Golden Age,’ in which life was stable and more prosperous.⁷ Consumer goods were more readily available, and housing standards improved. As Soviet citizens became more “consumerist,” new social hierarchies were formed and reinforced based on access to and ownership of consumer goods.⁸ While the lack of scarcity of material goods during the 1970s perhaps placated some Soviet citizens who had lived through more turbulent times, others felt frustration and apathy toward their inability to effect political change.

Consumerist culture had a profound effect on Soviet youth. Foreign influence played a role on shaping of identity—Western music and black market sale of Western goods, such as fashion, allowed young people to “connect with the ‘Imaginary West,’” not as a form of political resistance, but as an embodiment of a place that addressed their individual needs.⁹ Fashion served a role in socialization; the ability to “dress as they liked and be free from harassment” was

⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁵ Ibid., 155-156.

⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁷ Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

⁹ Ibid., 5; Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 202-6.

increasingly viewed as a “right, not an act of defiance.”¹⁰ Both fashion and music, among other media, served as a shelter from a “dry burea[u]cratic eternity.”¹¹ Ekaterina Dobrotvorskaja, who grew up in the Soviet Union, expresses criticism for the Brezhnev era, which “ignored the inner needs of young life” and enforced “limitations on behavior.” The only idea of the future that was offered was a “rigidly official optimism.” In everyday life, people had “no individual value.” In addition, the inability to accomplish anything beyond one’s narrowly proscribed political role “disheartened” many young people so much that they felt there was no “possibility of solving any problems whatsoever” in society.¹² Through various types of escapism, Soviet youth could cultivate their own personal identities.

Suri echoes Dobrotvorskaya, stating that this “widespread pessimism and cynicism” of late socialism was particularly pronounced among young people.¹³ Those who came of age during Khrushchev’s leadership felt a disconnect between the optimism and heroism espoused by propaganda and the “realism of Solzhenitsyn and *samizdat*,” which young readers evidently preferred. One young person stated that, “I want to read about real youth, not an invented one.” Others eschewed optimism toward the future altogether; 18-year-old person wrote that “I’ve lost faith in the future, faith in life.”¹⁴

As film adaptations of science fiction novels comprised a bulk of science fiction films and were among the most popular with viewers, it is necessary to examine the impact of science fiction literature as well.¹⁵ Reading was an important pastime in the Soviet Union and provided

¹⁰ Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumerist Culture*, 158.

¹¹ Dobrotvorskaja, “Soviet Teens of the 1970s,” 146.

¹² *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³ Suri, “The Promise and Failure,” 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵ Lubrano, “The Soviet Union,” 21; Menzel, “Russian Science Fiction,” 20; Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 38; Nishi, *Tarkovsky and His Time*, 122.

an escape for many young people. The USSR “prided itself in being *the* ‘most reading’ nation.” Students would meet to discuss literature, particularly Russian and Western science fiction authors, like Aleksandr Belyaev, H.G. Wells, and Ray Bradbury. In his book *Soviet Baby Boomers*, Donald J. Raleigh draws upon oral histories of Soviet citizens born in 1949-50. In an interview, Igor Litvin said of his literature discussions with other students: “You’d be ashamed not to know something. If you didn’t, you’d keep silent, run home and open a reference book so that the next day you’d be able to show that you knew.”¹⁶

Yet, for others, evidence suggests that unhappiness with official publication continued until the dissolution of the USSR. As late as 1990, readers of science fiction felt that books were “insufficient.” In a letter to the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper, a science fiction fan expressed his dissatisfaction with current books and magazine publications, and was referred to several *samizdat* fanzines that covered a variety of themes.¹⁷ *Samizdat*, or self-published magazines, covered a variety of topics, from politics to literature. *Samizdat fantastiki*, or science fiction fanzines, were one means of respite from officially sanctioned literature. These fanzines were often distributed by science fiction fan clubs, and increased in popularity from the 1960s onward; by the 1980s, there were at least 46 separate *samizdat fantastiki* publications.¹⁸

Although bounded in some respects by censorship, science fiction literature was unique in many ways, in that it bridged the gap between science and the humanities, “connect[ing] readers from different cultural spheres and social strata, from different generations and educational backgrounds,” while also treading a careful path between “official and unofficial

¹⁶ Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 129.

¹⁷ “Fantasticheskii Samizdat,” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (U.S.S.R.), May 20, 1990, http://www.fandom.ru/klf/fanzins_2.htm.

¹⁸ Chertkov, “Fenziny,” 118-122.

culture.”¹⁹ As it dealt with “alternative...models of society,” it held the power to bolster the aims of socialism or “compete with the party ideology.”

From the mid-1960s onward, a shift occurred in the themes of science fiction films - they explored darker futures, where mankind must address what they have done to the world, or focused instead on introspective themes, such as discovering a sense of self, or rekindling relationships with other people or with God instead of furthering the goals of socialism. Historian James Blackford argues that the “rise and fall of communism” can be traced in Soviet science fiction film. As an “ideologically charged genre,” science fiction evolved from the “wide-eyed optimism of space fantasies” during the early years of the Space Race to “damning post-Chernobyl nuclear nightmares” as the Soviet Union “crumbled from within” politically and economically.²⁰ The American moon landing in 1969 also undermined confidence in the Soviet space program, turning Soviet science fiction to “more thoughtful, highbrow concerns.”²¹ After this turning point, science fiction as a genre became split between philosophical films, such as those by Andrei Tarkovsky and Konstantin Lopushansky, and those that continued the optimistic adventure narrative, typically aimed at children.²² In spite of their futuristic or otherworldly settings, later films were often subversive, “anti-science” films at their roots, arguing that the search for the individual could not be found in the dogmatic quest for knowledge or the material.²³ These films had their roots in the social problems of the Khrushchev era, and were exacerbated by the political repression under Brezhnev’s administration. Despite the efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev, these issues lingered until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

¹⁹ Birgit Menzel, “Russian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature,” in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective Vol. 78* (Munich: Sagner, 2005), 1.

²⁰ Blackford, “Red Skies,” 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²² Voinova, *The Cold War in Science Fiction*, 9.

²³ David C. Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, (Harlow, England: Longman, 2003), 184.

While “antiutopias” were forbidden, these topics were not necessarily contrary to the party line; authors were permitted to write a type of science fiction referred to as the “cautionary tale” (*romanpreduprezhdenie*). In these stories, a social or political problem must be addressed “before the world can enjoy full communism.”²⁴ Within literature, authors often evaded censorship by including only “a few unorthodox paragraphs” into a work that was “generally orthodox.”²⁵ Among writers and readers of science fiction, opinion was divided on pessimistic literature. In a discussion on science fiction literature within the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* from 1969-1970, some contributors considered cautionary literature “both useful and necessary,” while others rejected it, suggesting that public opinion was split on this issue during this time period.

The division on cautionary tales was reflected in film as well. Narratives did not change immediately from utopian themes to dystopian themes. *The Andromeda Nebula* (1967), for instance, combines aspects of both preceding films and later ones.²⁶ Based on the novel of the same title by Ivan Efremov, the film follows two storylines. In the first, cosmonauts travel to a distant planet to study an alien race, only to discover that life on the planet has been almost completely annihilated due to experimentation with radioactivity. On their return to Earth, they become trapped by the gravitational field of a star. They must land on one of the planets orbiting the star, but it is populated by predators that attack the nervous system. The second takes place on Earth, which is depicted as a clean, beautiful, utopian society, and follows the relationships of the characters there. Neither storyline is resolved by the end of the film, as it was intended to be part one of a three part series, but was not completed due to the death of the starring actor, Sergei

²⁴ McGuire, *Red Stars*, 63.

²⁵ Ibid., 68.

²⁶ *The Andromeda Nebula*, Directed by Yevgeni Sherstobitov, 1967, U.S.S.R.: Goskino.

Stolyarov. Nevertheless, the inclusion of cautionary themes alongside “traditional” science fiction tropes make the film a worthy target for analysis.

The destruction of a society due to radioactivity is a powerful warning against tampering with a dangerous substance without proper precaution. During this time period, Cold War tensions were still strong.²⁷ Although the fear-mongering present in American propaganda was not as significant in Soviet propaganda, the public likely still felt concern for nuclear war. Yet, predictably, the disaster does not take place on Earth, which is shown as a communist paradise. Both those on Earth and those on the spaceship struggle with the differences in time and distance. Instead of painting the exploration of space as a purely romantic and heroic adventure, the viewer sees the sacrifice that both parties make, and the devastating toll it has on human relationships, suggesting that there are negative points to space exploration. Yet, the narrative is generally similar to other science fiction films from the 1950s and early 1960s, in which cosmonauts are tasked with the mission of studying distant worlds, and rescuing those in danger or overcoming dangerous conditions themselves.

The directors on whom this chapter focuses, Andrei Tarkovsky and Konstantin Lopushansky, both came of age during the 1950s and 1960s. Their films can be interpreted as a reaction to both the issues of daily living as well as the unbridled optimism and utopianism of earlier science fiction films like those discussed in the first chapter. Science fiction film underwent a split during the 1970s that divided the genre among “art films,” or films with philosophical themes instead of mere entertainment value, and adventure-oriented and children’s films, such as *Moscow-Cassiopeia* (1973), *Teens in the Universe* (1974), and *Orion’s Loop* (1980). As “art films,” Tarkovsky’s and Lopushansky’s films were intended to cater to a more

²⁷ Everly Driscoll, “The Soviet Space Program,” *Science News* 99, no. 18 (May 1, 1971), 303.

specific set of viewers. Nevertheless, the films generally experienced considerable popularity. *Solaris* was successful at the box office, selling over 10 million tickets, and shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 1972.²⁸ *Stalker* sold 4.3 million tickets and won the Ecumenical Jury Prize in Cannes.²⁹ *Dead Man's Letters* won several prizes, at FIPRESCI in 1986 and at Cannes in 1987, among others. *Visitor to a Museum* was allegedly an “embarrassing failure” at the XVI International Moscow Film Festival in 1989, as it failed to win the Grand Prize; however, it did win the prize for Best Direction.³⁰ The themes discussed within them speak to a larger discontent and apathy within Soviet society, and the desire for a sense of self, meaningful connections with other people, or the longing for something beyond the material.

David Gillespie argues that Andrei Tarkovsky's films were imbued with “an individual and intensely private significance that nevertheless spoke to millions of his fellow Russians.”³¹ As one of Russia's greatest *auteur* directors, Tarkovsky touches on the importance of the personal and the self. Tarkovsky himself rejected the present, instead “researching his own past as a means of understanding the present, using his own memory to gauge the national experience.”³² His films focus on the importance of one's roots and what we share in common: the “family house, childhood, country, Earth.”³³ He frequently uses the concept of the mirror, in which “the individual reflects his times and the times reflect upon the individual.” In this sense,

²⁸ Birgit Beumers, *Directory of World Cinema: Russia*, (Bristol, UK: Intellect Ltd, 2011), 44.

²⁹ Stephen Dalton, “Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris* and *Stalker*: The making of two inner-space odysseys,” *BFI*, December 2014, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/tarkovsky/>.

³⁰ Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 16; Anna Lawton, *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years*, (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2002), 237.

³¹ “Tarkovsky continued to create art films such as *Solaris*, *Mirror*, *Stalker*, which has a small circulation and did not attract a mass audience.” Anna Lawton, *The Red Screen*, 8; David Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, 167.

³² Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, 184.

³³ *Ibid.*, 167.

Tarkovsky's films are representative of both the effect of the political atmosphere upon the individual within the Soviet Union, while also providing refuge from it.

Tarkovsky's science fiction films were very much indicative of life on Earth and the individual's relationship to society. In his 1972 film *Solaris*, which was based on the Stanislaw Lem novel by the same title, the protagonist, Kris Kelvin, is a psychologist who is sent to a space station that is orbiting the distant planet Solaris. While there, he must examine the crew, who have been suffering from mysterious mental afflictions.

Despite the setting in outer space, *Solaris* is a "philosophical reflection on man's relationship with the earth, his home and his family." The film is "anti-science," professing a need to connect with other humans, and "about the qualities of human life that can only be experienced and not explained by science or rational thought."³⁴ In this respect, it can be considered to be at odds with the propaganda of the space race and "official Soviet ideology of 'the greatness of science,'" by seeking a deeper, perhaps subversive, meaning.

Many aspects of *Solaris* center it in the past rather than the future, and even the present day within the film is imbued with a sense of unreality. The film itself opens with Kelvin at his childhood home, where he is spending his last days on Earth before traveling to the Solaris space station. His father mentions that they built the house to look like his grandfather's house, and that he does not like innovation. While visiting his parents, a former cosmonaut, Henri Benton, shows Kelvin and his parents an old film in which he is interviewed about his experiences on Solaris. Benton saw strange things that defy explanation, and Kelvin believes that they are merely hallucinations. Frustrated, Benton leaves. Kelvin burns his old mementos, expecting that he will likely not return to Earth.

³⁴ Ibid., 173.

Shortly after his arrival at the Solaris Station, Kelvin begins witnessing glimpses of unknown figures. This ominous atmosphere is amplified by the disorganized and almost abandoned appearance of the station. Only two scientists, Sartorius and Snaut, remain on the station; the third, his friend Gibarian, committed suicide before Kelvin arrived. In Gibarian's chambers, Kelvin discovers a video warning him about the dangers of the station. Disconcerted, Kelvin goes to sleep.

Upon waking in the morning, he finds his wife, Hari, in his room. This terrifies him, as she has been dead for ten years. She has no memory of how she came to the Solaris Station. He hastily escorts her to an escape pod, and launches her into space. Afterward, Dr. Snaut explains to Kelvin that the Solaris ocean has a powerful effect on the human psyche, causing their memories to come to life. These "guests" will return again and again, no matter how many times one tries to get rid of them. Interestingly, the Solaris ocean only began to have this effect after scientists bombarded it with X-rays, suggesting that this is not a natural occurrence, but rather a consequence of dangerous experimentation by humans.



Figure 11: Kelvin and his wife Hari; Solaris, USSR, 1972, Andrei Tarkovsky.

Following this revelation, Kelvin spends nearly all of his time with his wife, instead of adhering to his mission or even assisting the other scientists in understanding the "guests." He

has many conversations with Dr. Snaut and Dr. Sartorius about the guests, and the meaning of human relationships. Toward the end of the film, Kelvin says the manifestation of Hari is worth more to him than science. He discusses with Snaut how the feeling of love cannot be explained – the concept can, but not the feeling. Finally, Kelvin reaches the conclusion explains that perhaps he was meant to go to the space station to understand love – not only romantic love, but love of humanity – instead of science. One of Kelvin’s closing remarks is “Shame - the feeling that will save mankind,” as he reflects on his own mistakes and those made by humanity as a whole, suggesting that acknowledgement of these mistakes will work to improve us.

In the end, Kelvin struggles with whether he should return to Earth, or descend to Solaris to relive his memories of what he has lost. The final scene shows him back at his childhood home, speaking with a younger version of his mother. As the camera zooms out, the viewer can see that his childhood home sits upon an island, surrounded by a vast sea, implying that he did indeed choose to abandon his mission and live in his memories upon Solaris.



Figure 12: Kelvin’s father’s dacha, floating on an island in the Solaris Ocean; Solaris, USSR, 1972, Andrei Tarkovsky.

While *Solaris* begins with a narrative that is similar to earlier science fiction films, it rapidly turns into a very different type of story. The protagonist, Kelvin, abandons his mission at the Solaris Station almost immediately upon arriving when he is confronted with the apparition

of his dead wife. Instead of remaining strong in the face of adversity and overcoming his emotions in order to fulfill his duty, he is shown realistically, with a much more human response: initial shock, then regret and sadness for losing his wife so many years before, and love for the manifestation of Hari.

The fact that the “guests” only began appearing after humans tampered with the Solaris ocean is significant, because the guests function as a consequence for their actions. They are created from human memories of the past which have been carried into the present; in the case of Kelvin, Hari is a manifestation of past mistakes. Although from a political standpoint, it appears that Kelvin has failed to carry out his work on the Solaris Station, he has instead made steps to rectify these past mistakes, from a personal and humanitarian standpoint. He does not have the scientific expertise to undo the damage done to the Solaris ocean, but he does serve as an example to the other two scientists that they have lost sight of their own humanity. As a psychologist, Kelvin is the perfect intermediary between scientific knowledge and human emotion. In this respect, Kelvin is a testament to the value of human relationships over the empty pursuit of technological progress. In an era where technology was evolving rapidly and consumerism was beginning to take hold on Soviet society, *Solaris* functions as a reminder of the value of connections with other people.

The tropes that existed in earlier science fiction films do not occur here. There is no heroic sacrifice for another – the closest parallel might be Kelvin’s decision to stay behind on Solaris to live out his past memories of his family, but he does this for himself alone. The theme of the film could be interpreted as an inversion of older films, in that the narrative is one of man versus man, but is truly man versus nature reframed, as it shows man renegotiating his relationship with nature after damaging it through scientific experimentation. Lastly, *Solaris*,

although dreamlike at times in its narrative and cinematography, is never framed as a dream; Tarkovsky insisted that his films represented a type of reality. In his biography, *Sculpting in Time*, he stated that, “Cinema is an art which operates with *reality*.” Film has the unique ability to convey the ideas of the director to the audience “graphically and immediately...so that the audience’s emotions become akin to those of a witness, if not actually of an author.”³⁵ Instead of acting as a fictional adventure story with no bearing on real life, Tarkovsky meant for his films to connect with viewers on a personal level.

These tropes are further explored in Tarkovsky’s 1979 film, *Stalker*. Based on the 1972 book *Roadside Picnic* by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, the film is set on Earth at an indeterminate time in the future, and centers on journey to a mysterious area called the Zone, which was allegedly formed after a meteorite landed. The Zone was blocked off by police after attempts to explore the area resulted in several people going missing. Yet there is a rumor that there is a room within the Zone that will grant one’s deepest desire if he or she travels there. The protagonist, the Stalker, takes people to this room for a fee. In actuality, the room appears to be an ordinary place, but the Stalker insists that this truth must not get out in order to preserve the hope of others.

The two men who accompany him are simply referred to by their professions: the Professor and the Writer. The Writer wishes to travel to the Zone to recover his inspiration, while the Professor wants to study the Zone. The film opens in black and white, with the Stalker’s wife begging him not to go back to the Zone, yet he insists on going. As the police and military have cordoned off the Zone, the Stalker and the two other men must sneak into the Zone without notice. Once they enter the Zone, the film is in color. The Zone is mostly wilderness, littered

³⁵ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 177.

with the ruins of modern society – broken telephone poles, abandoned cars and tanks, and the ruins of old buildings. The Stalker says that he is “home at last,” mentioning how beautiful the place is.



Figure 13: The Zone; Stalker, USSR, 1979, Andrei Tarkovsky.

He walks away for a few minutes, leaving the Professor and the Writer to talk. The two mention that the Stalker was formerly in jail, and that he has a “mutant daughter” who was a “victim of the Zone” – suggesting that the Zone has some kind of radioactive effect on the nearby population, or has affected the Stalker, who has passed this mutation on to his child. They also discuss Porcupine, who was the teacher of the current Stalker. Porcupine became very rich after traveling to the Room inside the Zone, but hanged himself a week later.

At this point, the Stalker returns and begins to show them the way to the Room. He says that the shortest path in the Zone is the most dangerous; instead, one must “feel” the right way to proceed in the Zone, or the Zone will “punish.” People die there for seemingly no reason, sometimes even on the threshold of the Room; one of the men asks the Stalker if it only lets good

people pass, and the Stalker says he does not know. He thinks it only lets those who have lost all hope pass – “Not good or bad, but wretched people” – although those people will die too if they do not behave properly within the Zone.

The three discuss the nature and impact of the Room with one another. The Professor suggests that it might be dangerous if everybody believed in the power of the Room; he says everybody will come here, not just for money or inspiration, but to change the world. The Writer disagrees with wanting to change the world to impose some kind of personal idea of a “just society,” because that is imposing ideology, instead of only fulfilling a personal wish. The Stalker replies there should not be happiness that comes at someone else's expense.

When they finally reach the Room, the Professor reveals that he has brought a bomb to destroy it. The Stalker tries to wrestle it away from him, but the Writer stops him. The Stalker chastises the Professor, saying that he is destroying people's hope, and that hope is all they have left in the world. The Writer throws the bomb into the water outside the Room, and they ultimately decide not to enter, remaining on the threshold of the Room instead.

They return home, and the film gives little idea as to what Writer and Professor gained by traveling to the Zone. Privately, the Stalker says to his wife that the Writer and Professor call themselves intellectuals, but they do not believe. Despite her anger toward him at the beginning, his wife helps him to bed and says in a monologue directed at the viewer how they have had sad times together, but overall she is happy with him and their life. Before they married, she says that her mother warned her about the Stalker, but she fell in love with him anyway. Remarking on this, Tarkovsky stated that, “I made some sort of complete statement: namely that human love alone is – miraculously – proof against the blunt assertion that there is no hope for the world.”³⁶

³⁶ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 199.

The final scene shows his daughter, Monkey, the supposed “degenerate,” pushing a glass across a table using telekinesis – implying that she may be more than she seems and, indeed, may represent hope for humanity, just as the Zone does.

Tarkovsky stated that “The Zone doesn’t symbolise anything, any more than anything else does in my films: the zone is a zone, it’s life, and as he makes his way across it a man may break down or he may come through.”³⁷ But if the Zone is meant to be a metaphor for life, as Tarkovsky says, then it is an allegory for life in our world as well. The journey across it (which one may survive or not) is something that requires a certain amount of hope and faith. Within the film, this is reinforced by the fact that one must “feel” their way across the Zone instead of seeing a direct path to their goal. The Stalker believes wholly in the power of this Zone and the need to have faith to traverse it; yet, the viewer never really sees any of the supernatural power of which the Zone is allegedly capable. Certain areas inspire fear or discomfort, but nothing concrete occurs. Some strange, unexplainable things occur, like the ringing of the telephone and the light bulb that lights up (suggesting electricity is somehow going to the Zone) but these are not necessarily supernatural, merely strange. Overall, the concept of the Zone's supernatural power is left open-ended, similar to faith or religious belief.

The concept of faith permeates the film in many ways. For instance, the three men represent aspects of humanity: The Professor, as a scientist, is a symbol for logic; however, logic alone is not enough to traverse the Zone. The Writer symbolizes art, a force in life that seeks deeper meaning. The Stalker represents faith, and he “seems to be weak, but essentially it is he who is invincible because of his faith and his will to serve others.”³⁸ He never ceases to believe in the power of the Zone, or the necessity of having hope and faith. In this respect, Tarkovsky

³⁷ Ibid., 200.

³⁸ Ibid., 181.

implies that faith is more powerful than logic – an ideology that can be seen at odds with communist rhetoric. This is made more apparent because the Stalker’s faith is not framed as a blind faith to or will to serve the State; he is actively participating in an activity that undermines the government, but he does so to preserve hope in the people.

Religious images are also scattered throughout the film. An icon of St. John the Baptist from the Ghent altar by the van Eyck brothers is shown in the water in the Zone. At another point, the Writer places a branch shaped like a crown of thorns upon his head. Water plays a significant role in the film, particularly acting as a “dampening” effect upon emotion or violence. Along with the icon, rusting weapons are shown underwater. When the Stalker discovers that the Writer has taken a gun into the Zone, he takes it from him and gently places it into a puddle, abandoning it. At the threshold of the Room, the Professor’s bomb is neutralized by throwing it into water. Water, in this sense, could be interpreted as having a spiritual cleansing effect.



Figure 14: Icon of St. John the Baptist in the water; Stalker, USSR, 1979, Andrei Tarkovsky.



Figure 15: The Stalker places the gun into the water; Stalker, USSR, 1979, Andrei Tarkovsky.

Tarkovsky was resistant to the idea that his films contained metaphors, stating that “the fairly widely held view of cinema as a system of signs therefore seems to me profoundly and essentially mistaken.”³⁹ His films were intended as art, in which the primary goal was the emotional effect on the audience. Yet, although artists may have their own view of a piece they have created, it is assured that viewers will create their own interpretations, like the unanticipated meanings of official discourse that Yurchak mentions.⁴⁰ While Tarkovsky perhaps had a different view of *Stalker*, creating it merely as a form of art, Yurchak reads his own experiences into this film.

Yurchak argues that this film and the book on which it was based are meant to be “a metaphor of late Soviet reality.”⁴¹ Likening the Zone to the Imaginary West as a place that is geographically close to the Soviet Union but inaccessible for the average Soviet citizen, he gives

³⁹ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁰ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 50.

⁴¹ Ibid., 160-161.

a more concrete explanation, stating that it is “intimate, within reach, and yet unattainable.” Much like the fantastic images that Soviet citizens held of the West as something greater than it truly was, the Zone is built up in the minds of people who wish to travel there, only to be disappointed by the truth. Yet, the quest is not necessarily in vain; characters like the stalker find something deeper, something mystical in the Zone that pushes him to return. In this respect, Tarkovsky’s films push against earlier optimistic films of space exploration and travel, examining instead problems here on Earth. Both *Solaris* and *Stalker* examine the isolation of the individual, and the need to seek one’s selfhood in far off, dreamlike spaces. In *Solaris*, man finds himself in outer space; in *Stalker*, within the Zone.

In contrast to the films of the 1950s and 1960s, the protagonists of Tarkovsky’s films are not idealized heroes, such as scientists or cosmonauts; instead, they are ordinary and flawed men. Neither of these men fulfills the ideal of the New Soviet Man, both physically and mentally ordinary, and further, the Stalker may be considered morally questionable, at least from a legal standpoint. While Kelvin, a psychologist, is a scientist of a sort, his work focuses on increasing the understanding of the individual and human relationships. Thus, his humanity is depicted in contrast to the scientists that he is sent to assist. At the end of the film, he chooses to explore human relationships, and abandons his scientific mission. In the case of *Stalker*, the Stalker could be considered an anti-hero instead. By entering the Zone, an area under government control, he commits an illegal act again and again. He is not a scientist; he is an ordinary citizen who feels drawn to something he cannot explain nor fully understand. The Zone, for him, is a sort of mystical or spiritual place, despite the Room’s inability to truly grant wishes; yet, the Stalker believes that it still provides hope to those on the outside. In some ways, the Room mirrors the hope inspired by the idea of the Imaginary West, as Yurchak speculates, that there is something

beyond the Soviet experience – whether that is something definite or more abstract is perhaps up to the viewer. Like earlier science fiction films, Tarkovsky's films can be interpreted as morality tales. However, instead of learning an ideological lesson, the characters learn the value of personal relationships and human emotion.

Konstantin Lopushansky gleaned many of his filmmaking techniques from Tarkovsky during his work as a production assistant on *Stalker*, a film which was a “key influence” on his own films.⁴² Credited with the creation of the “futuristic film disaster” genre, both of his *glasnost*-era dystopian films, *Letters from a Dead Man* and *Visitor to a Museum* take place in a post-apocalyptic future, in which mankind has destroyed the planet, and the few survivors reflect on the consequences of nuclear war.⁴³ Reminiscent of pre-revolution Russian novels, his films have an “unapologetic religious underpinning,” as he “wanted to continue the philosophical-Christian tradition of the national culture.”⁴⁴

The release of *Letters from a Dead Man* coincided with the Chernobyl disaster, making the film startlingly relevant and remarkable for its time. Similarities can also be drawn between *Letters from a Dead Man* and the 1983 Soviet nuclear false alarm incident, in which Soviet lieutenant colonel Stanislav Petrov prevented nuclear war by declaring a false alarm after the satellite warning system indicated that the United States had fired missiles at the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ In *Letters from a Dead Man*, mankind is not so fortunate as to have a hero like Petrov; the narrator tells the viewer that missiles were fired by accident, leading to nuclear war.

The narrator, Professor Larsen, is an ex-scientist living in a fallout shelter who writes letters to his dead son, attempting to make sense of what has happened, and insisting that the

⁴² Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 16; Blackford, “Red Skies,” 48.

⁴³ Michael Brashinsky and Andrew Horton, *Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 33.

⁴⁴ Lawton, *Before the Fall*, 237.

⁴⁵ Michael Peppard, “Accidental Armageddon,” *Commonweal* 142, issue 6: 1.

human spirit will somehow survive. He and his wife are staying in the shelter beneath the museum with the museum staff. It is unclear at first if the man's son is alive elsewhere, or if he has not been born yet; however, the truth becomes apparent when the viewer sees what happened during the "disaster."

Larsen remembers when he was taken to a shelter immediately following the disaster, but then escaped by pretending to be dead and exiting via the "funeral tunnel" for corpses, in order to find his wife and son. He goes to the "children's department" and insists on entering to search for his son. A nightmarish, grisly scene greets him – doctors operate on children, and the air is filled with their wails. The protagonist shuts his eyes and leaves, yelling in despair, but the cries of the children do not leave his mind. He does not find his son.

At the beginning of the film, he goes to visit a pastor and a woman, Theresa, who are looking after a group of children. They are unable to speak and are in a state of catalepsy. A doctor is examining them when Larsen arrives, and says that the children are parentless and ill and thus cannot be taken to the central bunker. Larsen and Theresa ask him to reconsider, but the doctor says that they are under martial law and there is no other way. Larsen's wife dies shortly after he returns, and the others begin to make preparations to move to the central bunker. Theresa, afraid for the future of the children, brings them to Larsen, as she must move to the central bunker as well and cannot take them along.

Larsen stays behind to watch the children, celebrating Christmas with them, but he soon becomes sick. As the children look after him, they narrate his final days, which they have recorded in a journal. The journal entries are Biblical in style, referencing an "exodus" that is to come, and repeating Larsen's statements, such as "Remember: the world has not died," as if he is

a kind of prophet. In the final moments of the film, the children leave the shelter, wandering into the unknown toward an uncertain future.



Figure 16: Larsen and the children create a makeshift Christmas tree; Letters from a Dead Man, USSR, 1986, Konstantin Lopushansky.



Figure 17: The children leave the bunker in search of a better world; Letters from a Dead Man, USSR, 1986, Konstantin Lopushansky.

While his follow-up film, *Visitor to a Museum*, was perhaps heavy-headed in its religious message and disturbing in its imagery, the film is nevertheless a powerful commentary on

environmentalism, materialism, and spirituality in the Soviet Union. The narrative focuses on an ordinary man who becomes a “Christ-like idol” to the survivors of ecological disaster as he embarks on a journey to visit a museum about life before the apocalypse that is only accessible once a year when the tide is lowest.⁴⁶ While the blatant religious motifs in both films are a criticism of the suppression of religion within the Soviet Union and reflective of Lopushansky’s own beliefs, they nevertheless argue for a search of self within the intangible, in a world beyond the everyday lives of citizens.

The world in *Visitor to a Museum* is a ruined one, with little hope for the future – the air is difficult to breathe, the land is covered in trash, the oceans are polluted, and the sea level has risen. Society has been divided into two groups of people: the “civilized” people, who have destroyed the environment, and the “degenerate” people, who, despite physical and mental disabilities, recognize the errors of humanity and have turned to religion as a coping mechanism. The devolution of humanity, however, is reflected not in the physical deformities of the degenerates, but in the “civilized” people. They brutalize the degenerates, isolating them in concentration camps, and dismiss the damage that they have done to the environment. They distract themselves with fashion; for instance, the men wear high heels and feminine clothing, insinuating that they have been emasculated by materialism. It is unclear whether this is intended on the part of Lopushansky to be a criticism of Western fashion, particularly the androgyny in 1980s clothing and the materialism of Soviet youth, or merely means within the film to convey the breakdown of traditional gender roles and society as we know it. Nevertheless, the protagonist, an unnamed man, stands apart from the other characters.

⁴⁶ Blackford, “Red Skies,” 48.



Figure 18: The Visitor speaking with one of the degenerates; Visitor to a Museum, USSR, 1989, Konstantin Lopushansky.



Figure 19: Androgynous men's fashion on television; Visitor to a Museum, USSR, 1989, Konstantin Lopushansky.

The man (henceforth the Visitor) seeks to visit a museum about the old ways of life, but the road there is only accessible for a week, and the journey takes three days to the museum and

three days back. While staying at an inn by the coast waiting for the sea levels to fall, he becomes a messiah to the degenerates, who enlist him in their quest for salvation. After visiting the church of the degenerates, he traverses the ocean, appealing to God throughout his journey. He begs God to save the degenerates and to “let them out” of this world, “for they suffer for the sins of others.” The degenerates alone are trying to atone for the wrongs committed to the planet, and thus, deserve God’s forgiveness and salvation. Ironically, the Visitor never actually makes it to the museum; the film ends with him walking across the pile of refuse, wailing.



Figure 20: The Visitor walking through a sea of rubbish; Visitor to a Museum, USSR, 1989, Konstantin Lopushansky.

The religious themes in *Visitor to a Museum* are overt. The Visitor is both a Christ- and Moses-like figure; his crossing of the sea at low tide bears direct similarity to the crossing of the Red Sea. He acts as a leader for the degenerates, hoping to leave the “civilized” world behind, in search of a better life.

Both *Letters from a Dead Man* and *Visitor to a Museum* were heavily rooted in the current events of their time. As *Letters from a Dead Man* focused on a dystopian future due to nuclear holocaust, the focus in *Visitor to a Museum* is on environmentalism. Following World War II, mining, chemical production, and weapons manufacturing and testing increased exponentially in the Eastern Bloc.⁴⁷ As a result, pollution was a significant problem in the Soviet Union and its satellite states that largely went unaddressed. “A product of years of Communist mismanagement,” the “ecological devastation” of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries affected, by 1990, 60 percent of the Soviet population, or 175 million people, who were living in “ecologically inferior conditions.”⁴⁸ The problems ranged from air pollution to water pollution to heightened radioactivity. In the GDR, heart and respiratory disease in the Halle-Leipzig metropolitan area was fifteen times higher than anywhere else in the country. Czechoslovakia had the highest death rate due to cancer out of all members of the United Nations, primarily due to sulfur dioxide. In the central Asian countries, heavy metal contamination and waste from mining still pose a problem in the region today.⁴⁹ Soil pollution due to nitrate fertilizers and pesticides, particularly the continued use of DDT, in turn contaminated water supplies.⁵⁰

These environmental problems, particularly those concerning water, were publicized during *perestroika*. In December 1988, the State Committee of the Soviet Union for Environmental Protection released the first official Soviet report on the environment to the

⁴⁷ Petr Sharov et al., “The prevalence of toxic hotspots in former Soviet countries,” *Environmental Pollution* 211 (April 2016): 346.

⁴⁸ Barbara Jancar, “Democracy and the Environment in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,” *Harvard International Review* 12, Issue 4 (Summer 1990): 13.

⁴⁹ Sharov, “The prevalence of toxic hotspots,” 347.

⁵⁰ Jancar, “Democracy and the Environment,” 13-14.

public.⁵¹ Soviet citizens became more outspoken in their desires for cleaner air and water, and better regulations on quality of food. According to a 1990 interview with Ruben Mnatsakanyan, a scientific researcher in the department of geography at Moscow State University, the “coverage of environmental issues is rather good.” Mnatsakanyan’s colleague, Igor Altshuler, stated that people were increasingly aware of these problems, and became more “concerned about their survival.”⁵²

Lopushansky focused on dystopian futures that were created by problems in the present day that were allowed to continue unchecked. In this regard, his films are most certainly “cautionary tales,” intended to warn the viewer against the dangers of nuclear war and ecological destruction.

Lopushansky’s heroes further demonstrate the breakdown of Soviet ideals, in pursuing religion and spirituality outside of the constraints of communist society. Indeed, his films illustrate a world in which government has broken down altogether. The hero of *Letters from a Dead Man* is an ex-scientist, and can be interpreted as representative of a loss of faith in the scientific pursuit, as Lopushansky himself experienced under Soviet religious repression. The hero of *Visitor to a Museum* embodies the necessity of a Christ-like savior to instill hope and to rescue humanity. This shifts the focus of the pursuit of knowledge away from dogmatic views of science to the importance of spirituality in regaining pieces of what humanity has lost. However, his characters are not as fully developed as Tarkovsky’s characters; the sense of personal connection and the value of family is not strongly reinforced.

Stalker, *Letters from a Dead Man*, and *Visitor to a Museum* all touch on the topic of religion. Despite its position in communist rhetoric, atheism was not as pervasive as the Soviet

⁵¹ Barbara Richman, “The changing face of environmentalism in the Soviet Union,” *Environment* 32, Issue 2, 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

government would have liked. According to Svetlana Klimova and Elena Molostova, during the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union underwent a “reliological Renaissance.” This period was characterized by a “renewed interest in the sociology of religion” in order to further atheistic propaganda.⁵³ This emerged alongside Khrushchev’s antireligious campaign, which lasted from 1958 to 1964. Contrary to the hopes of the state, atheism had not made a significant impact; religion was not “dying out but persisting – sometimes even flourishing – even in the inhospitable conditions of socialist modernity.”⁵⁴ The focus on faith in Tarkovsky and Lopushansky’s films suggest that religion and spirituality never left or may have taken on new forms in the hearts and minds of Soviet citizens.

The tropes of science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s were either nonexistent or reworked in these later films. None of these films invokes a sense of sacrifice as older science fiction films did, nor are they framed as dreams. In all except *Solaris*, the setting was Earth instead of a faraway planet. While the futuristic setting is not as important as the philosophical and moral messages within Tarkovsky’s films, the dystopian settings in Lopushansky’s films are invaluable to his narratives, as they warned against the continuation of present day problems. On the surface, *Solaris* appeared more typical of preceding films in its characterization and setting; the protagonist, Kris Kelvin, is a psychologist, and as such, could be considered a scientist, and the story takes place on a distant space station orbiting the fictional planet Solaris. By delving deeper, however, the viewer observes how Tarkovsky dismantles many of these early tropes. Kelvin is not a cosmonaut or scientist in the typical sense; he studies human emotions and the psyche instead of rocket ships and the stars. He travels to the space station in order to find out

⁵³ Svetlana Klimova and Elena Molostova, “‘Scientific Atheism’ in Action: Soviet Sociology of Religion as an Agent of Marxist-Atheist Propaganda from the 1960s to the 1980s,” *Forum Philosophicum* 18, no. 2 (2013), 169-170.

⁵⁴ Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, “The Ticket to the Soviet Soul: Science, Religion, and the Spiritual Crisis of Late Soviet Atheism,” *The Russian Review* 73 (April 2014), 171.

why the scientists are suffering from psychological distress and unable to work. This “rescue mission” is abandoned when Kelvin himself begins to suffer from the same problems as the other scientists—he falls victim to the hallucinations caused by the Solaris ocean. Professor Larsen in *Letters from a Dead Man* was a former scientist. However, he speaks out against science, focusing instead on cultivating a sense of hope for the future. The protagonists of *Stalker* and *Visitor to a Museum* appear to be ordinary men, at least in terms of profession; they are remarkable for their sense of faith and belief in something greater.

In general, all four films are reflective of a general cynicism that existed among Soviet citizens who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. While the stability provided by Brezhnev appeased those who grew up during Stalin’s leadership, it did not have the same effect on the Soviet Baby Boomers, who believed that the Brezhnev era was the worst.⁵⁵ This generation was aware to some degree of the repressions that their parents experienced, but, as they did not experience them first-hand, their views were generally more open and they felt less fear of the regime.

It was this openness and increased access to information, however, that ingrained this generation with cynicism—especially when many learned that they were not always presented with the truth. Leonid Terlitsky said that, “We were the cynical generation because we knew. We had the opportunity to learn that, what were being sold as universal truths, were nothing like it.”⁵⁶ This disenchantment and the emptiness of ideological discourse led many Soviet youths to turn away from communism, instead searching inward for something greater. Tarkovsky’s and Lopushansky’s films, and other science fiction films like them, all spoke to this increasing cynicism and desire for individuality among Soviet youth, as well as a greater awareness of the

⁵⁵ Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 163.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

outside world. By breaking from the optimistic and ideological tropes of earlier science fiction, these films allowed science fiction as a genre to remain relevant.

It was not only the narratives and imagery in these films that made a powerful impact on their viewers. As we will see in the next chapter, film scores also contributed to their otherworldly nature, delineating the “alien” both on faraway planets, as in science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s, and the “alien” here on Earth, as in films of the 1970s and 1980s.

4 OTHERWORLDLY SOUNDSCAPES: FILM SCORES IN SCIENCE FICTION

FILM AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC IN THE EASTERN BLOC

Films from the 1950s and 1960s about space education and space exploration set the precedent for later science fiction films by using electronic music or electronic effects in their soundtracks. By the 1980s, electronic instrumentation in science fiction films and television shows was commonplace, and the popularity of electronic music had surged. The evolution of Soviet electroacoustic instruments is unique in some ways to Western development of these instruments. Early instruments, such as the theremin and the ANS synthesizer, were markedly different from Western electronic instruments in that they were not modeled after existing classical instruments. The theremin, invented in 1919, was also one of the earliest electronic instruments developed. This chapter will explore electronic music, primarily within film scores, and the wider cultural impact of this music. In the same way that Soviet youth were drawn to Western rock and roll music as a symbol of an Imaginary West, the use of electronic music in science fiction films connected this type of music with ideas of the future, outer space, and escapism from the present day in the minds of Soviet citizens: an Imaginary Elsewhere. In addition, electronic film scores contributed in part to the later popularity of electronic music and electronic instruments. The examination of this type of music allows insight into Soviet interests beyond Western media and trends alone. While rock and roll music no doubt held a vital place in the popular culture of Soviet youth, electronic music was also instrumental in creating a bridge between these young people and a “futuristic ethos,” or future-oriented ideology, which encouraged forward-thinking, experimental thoughts and philosophies with the hope of resolving stagnation within Soviet society and politics.¹ Electronic film scores created a cultural

¹ One example of young people who held these beliefs are Alexandr and Nikolai, as touched upon in their letters. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 230.

connection between the “futuristic” sounds of electronic instruments, and the otherworldly images of science fiction films. Through these sights and sounds, Eastern Bloc youth could envision a time and place apart from their daily reality.

Musicians had limited access to electronic instruments until the 1960s and 1970s, inhibiting the use of electronic music in a wide variety of media, and rendering it an experimental genre instead of a popular one. Although a few early instruments existed such as the theremin and ANS synthesizer (so named based on the initials of the inventor, Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin), widespread electronic musical experimentation across the Eastern Bloc did not come about until much later – the late 1950s to the early 1960s.² The theremin was one of the earliest electronic instruments in the world, and the first of its kind in the Soviet Union. Invented by Leon Theremin in 1919 at the Physico-Technical Institute at Petrograd University, this unusual instrument was played without being touched. A musician would control pitch and amplitude by holding his or her hands near two antennas on the instrument. The theremin gained worldwide fame after Theremin traveled to several different cities and gave concerts using his new invention, eventually patenting it in the United States in 1928.³ Although it was a remarkable instrument, it was difficult to play and did not initially have widespread use in concert music or film scores.

Invented by Yevgeny Murzin between 1937 and 1957, the ANS was the first Soviet synthesizer.⁴ Named after the Russian composer Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin, the

² Mark Rais, “Some Notes About Soviet Computer Music,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (1991), 535; Leo Sergejewitsch Theremin, “United States Patent: 1661058 - Method of and apparatus for the generation of sounds,” February 28, 1928; “United States Patent: 1658953 - Signaling apparatus,” February 14, 1928.”

Stanislav Kreichi, “ANS Synthesizer,” Theremin.ru, November 10, 1997, <http://www.theremin.ru/archive/ans.htm>.

³ James Wierzbicki, “Weird Vibrations: How the Theremin Gave Musical Voice to Hollywood’s Extraterrestrial ‘Others,’” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2002), 127.

⁴ Martin Alejandro Fumarola, “The Russian ANS Synthesizer: Another Early Electronic Instrument,” *Computer Music Journal* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 4.

instrument used photo-optic generation to synthesize sound from images drawn onto glass plates. Murzin continued work on a prototype of the ANS as a hobby until 1958, when he established a laboratory at Moscow State University and enlisted musicians and engineers to design a fully functioning instrument.⁵ In the 1960s, the ANS was one of the only synthesizers in the Soviet Union, and composers had to travel to Moscow to work with it. Thus, it remained a “unique apparatus available to only a limited circle of musicians.”⁶

In addition to scarcity of instruments, politics played a role in access to electronic instruments. In countries like the GDR, electronic instruments and musical experimentation were largely overlooked by the State. In her study of electroacoustics in the GDR, Tatjana Boehme-Mehner positions the origin of electronic instrumentation, at least in a studio setting, alongside the central service station for state radio *Studiotechnik Rundfunk*, as “no administrative difference existed between a radio tower and an electronic musical instrument,” thus making the process of creating electronic instruments and music fairly simple from a political perspective.⁷ In other countries, however, the political climate dramatically shaped electro-acoustic music, as was the case in Czechoslovakia, where officials considered this type of music controversial.⁸

Radio played an important role in the establishment of electronic music studios in the Soviet Union and throughout the world. Rapid technological advances brought on by World War II, interest in new sound technology, and a favorable economy enabled the establishment of electronic studios.⁹ As advances in audio technology benefited radio and television broadcasting

⁵ Stanislav Kreichi, “The ANS Synthesizer: Composing on a Photoelectronic Instrument,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995), 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷ Tatjana Böhme-Mehner, “Does the GDR Have its Own Electroacoustic Sound?” *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb. 2011), 8.

⁸ Libor Zajicek, “An oral history of electro-acoustic music of the Czech and Slovak republics,” *Master’s Thesis*, San Jose State University, (1995), 1.

⁹ Peter Manning, *Electronic and Computer Music*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19.

and these institutions had the existing infrastructure to facilitate this type of research, electronic studios were typically associated with broadcasting stations, although some universities also established research studios. In Western Europe, two of the earliest studios were the Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (RTF) in Paris and Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) in Cologne, both established in the early 1950s. The first electronic studio in the Eastern Bloc was established in 1956 in Berlin – the Research Lab for Inter-Disciplinary Problems in Musical Acoustics (*Forschungslabor für akustischmusikalische Grenzprobleme*) at the Technical Centre for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RFZ). One of its primary goals was the development of a synthesizer, the Subharchord. However, mass production of this instrument was never brought to fruition, as Nikita Khrushchev, upon touring the facility, “expressed his disapproval for this form of ‘cacophony.’”¹⁰ While the success of this particular studio was short-lived, electro-acoustic research was carried on in a variety of studios across the Eastern Bloc.

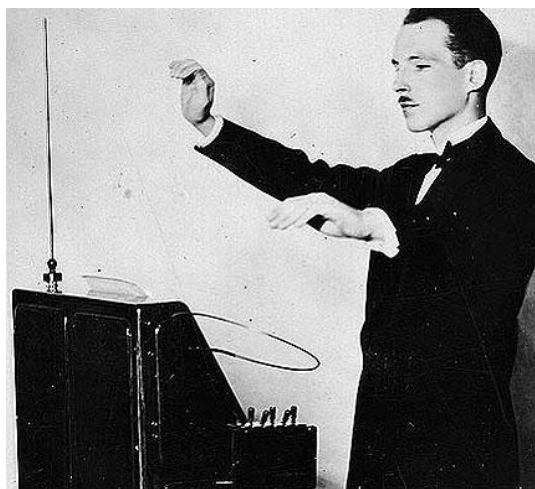


Figure 21: Leon Theremin playing his invention. Image via <http://www.theremin.info>.

¹⁰ Tatjana Böhme-Mehner, “Berlin was Home to the First Electronic Studio in the Eastern Bloc: The Forgotten Years of the Research Lab for Inter-disciplinary Problems in Musical Acoustics,” *Contemporary Music Review* 30, no. 1 (Feb. 2011), 37.



Figure 22: The ANS synthesizer. Image via <http://www.ruskiymir.ru>.

During this period of electro-acoustic experimentation, film composers also began incorporating electronic soundtracks in early science fiction films like *Planet of Storms* (1962), *Ikarie XB-1* (1963), and *Meeting a Dream* (1963), as well as space education films, such as Andrei Sokolov's *Into Space* (1962).¹¹ These film scores were the first exposure to electronic music for many people in the Eastern Bloc, as science fiction film popularized a formerly experimental musical form. Prior to the 1950s, classical instrumentation alone was used; many later films combined both classical and electroacoustic instruments. Pavel Klushantsev's space education films used classical music creatively to create sounds of space, incorporating the sounds of orchestra bells or celestas to create a lightweight, "floating" sound during the scene in *Road to the Stars* (1957) where the cosmonauts first experience weightlessness. Composers frequently relied on electronic music to convey a sense of the "alien" or "Otherness" in science fiction and space education films; it is often first heard in many of these films when the characters leave Earth and travel into space, or set foot on another planet. Scenes which took

¹¹ It is difficult to give an exact citation for this film, as little information exists online and the film does not appear to exist in any readily accessible format. The film is mentioned in documentary *Elektro Moskva*, as well as articles by Stanislav Kreichi. *Ikarie XB-1*, Directed by Jindřich Polák, 1964, Czechoslovakia: American International Pictures.

place on Earth generally used classical orchestration, suggesting a clear demarcation between otherworldliness and life on Earth.

This use of electronic instrumentation to depict an alien “Other” began in Hollywood cinema in the 1940s and 1950s; *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The Thing from Another World* (1951), and *It Came From Outer Space* (1953) all “gave wordless voice” to alien creatures with theremins.¹² Although an earlier Hollywood film, *Lady in the Dark* (1944), used a theremin for its soundtrack, the instrument functioned simply as a special effect to indicate when the “protagonist submits to [psychotherapy] treatment” instead of representing an alien creature or planet. In addition, the film is an adaptation of a Broadway musical instead of a science fiction narrative.¹³

The first use of the theremin within film occurred much earlier in the Soviet Union in the films *Alone* (1931) and *Komsomol: The Patron of Electrification* (1932), predating the first use of the theremin in Hollywood cinema.¹⁴ However, as the average American audience was unfamiliar with these films, the first uses of electronic music in film scores likely arose separately in the two countries.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the soundtracks of Hollywood science fiction films appeared to have had an influence on later Soviet science fiction cinema, which appropriated the same trope of electronic instrumentation to represent an alien world.

¹² James Wierzbicki, “The Imagined Sounds of Outer Space,” *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 8 (2014), 1, 10; *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Directed by Robert Wise, 1951, U.S.A.: 20th Century Fox; *The Thing from Another World*, Directed by Christian Nyby, 1951, U.S.A.: Winchester Pictures Corporation; *It Came From Outer Space*, Directed by Jack Arnold, 1953, U.S.A.: Universal Pictures.

¹³ Wierzbicki, “Weird Vibrations,” 128; *Lady in the Dark*, Directed by Mitchell Leisen, 1944, U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures.

¹⁴ *Odna*, Directed by Leonid Trauberg and Grigori Kozintsev, 1931, U.S.S.R.: Soyuzkino; *Komsomol: Shef elektrifikatsii*, Directed by Esfir Shub, 1932, U.S.S.R.; Ian Christie, “Making sense of early Soviet sound,” in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, (London: Routledge, 1991), 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

The synthesized diegetic sounds in science fiction film are also a type of electronic soundtrack to space travel. James Wierzbicki states that the sounds of space technology, from rocket ships to radio communication, are generally based on technology from the time in which the film was created. For instance, the “buzzes and bleeps” of controls inside the spacecraft are meant to evoke images of airplane cockpits, and the familiar “swooping ‘interference’ patterns - resulting from the...heterodyne effect” that one hears in shortwave radios are used for the rockets’ radios. These sound effects were made using early electronic instruments like the theremin, or, as was the case with *Forbidden Planet* (1956) composers Louis and Bebe Barron as well as several British television and radio dramas, likely created from simple oscillators or electrical gadgets.¹⁶ Although the sounds were reminiscent of current technology, the use of electronic instrumentation ensured that these film representations of “other-worldly or futuristic technology would indeed be ‘read’ as being otherworldly or futuristic.”¹⁷

The first film to use an electronic instrument, the ANS synthesizer, was Andrei Sokolov’s 1961 space education film, *Into Space*, in a score composed by Stanislav Kreichi. A commemoration of Soviet successes in the Space Race, Sokolov’s futuristic images of outer space meshed with the otherworldly sounds of Kreichi’s compositions. Kreichi described the “light and color of Sokolov’s cosmic landscapes” and “movement of cosmic objects” as being strongly influential on his compositions, using the photoelectronic nature of the ANS to reflect this in the sonic images he drew.¹⁸

The first science fiction film to incorporate electronic instrumentation was Pavel Klushantsev’s 1962 film *Planet of Storms*, including it for the portion of the film in which the

¹⁶ *Forbidden Planet*, Directed by Fred M. Wilcox, 1956, U.S.A.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

¹⁷ Wierzbicki, “The Imagined Sounds,” 8-10.

¹⁸ Kreichi, “The ANS Synthesizer,” 61; *Elektro Moskva*, Directed by Elena Tikhonova and Dominik Spritzendorfer, 2013, Austria: Rotor Film.

cosmonauts explore Venus. The opening credits and beginning of the film uses classical instrumentation. Electronic instrumentation is faintly played on the spaceship, presumably as diegetic sound for the equipment on board. When the cosmonauts first descend to Venus, the electronic soundtrack is featured prominently. Initially, the music is high-pitched and eerie, as one of the cosmonauts steps foot on the surface of the planet, then shifts to a light-hearted tune in a major key as he wanders about, inspecting pools of water and rocks. This use of electronic music is consistent throughout the scenes of Venus. When scenes are shown of Masha on board the spacecraft, classical music is played instead, establishing that the spaceship is their “home base” and reminiscent of Earth, while also reinforcing its status as a domestic sphere for Masha.

The film score of the 1959 film *The Sky Calls*, while mostly containing classical instrumentation, is also noteworthy in its own right. While composed by Yuliy Meitus, the musician Vyacheslav Mescherin, founder of the Orchestra of Electro-Musical Instruments in the mid-1950s, performed it. Mescherin created otherworldly sounds by amplifying and distorting the sounds of traditional instruments such as violins and balalaikas, while also pioneering instruments like the theremin and Evkodin I electronic keyboard. His efforts caught the attention of Soviet authorities, who asked him to record a version of the Internationale to place on board the Sputnik I. Critics were initially skeptical of his music; one critic, commenting on the use of electronic instruments, humorously stated that “Mescherin turns on an iron and out comes Tchaikovsky's First Symphony.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, Mescherin’s compositions did much to popularize electronic music outside of film alone. His music became widely known during the 1960s, used in TV shows such as *Nu Pogodi!*, a popular children’s cartoon, and played in factories. Yuri Gagarin was a fan of Mescherin, and Mescherin and his group were a regular

¹⁹ Charles Maynes III, “Mescherin Blasts Off The Orchestra of Electro-Musical Instruments swings the Sputnik once again,” *Transitions Online*, (Jan. 20, 2003), <http://www.tol.org/client/article/8346-mescherin-blasts-off.html?print>.

sight at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Alexei Leonov, the first person to complete a spacewalk, stated that Mescherin's electronic music "more than anything simulates the experience I felt while floating in the open cosmos."²⁰ Although Mescherin is scarcely known today, his music was the soundtrack to the lives of those who lived through the 1960s and 1970s. Through Mescherin, electronic music became closely associated not only with science fiction, but with the space program and the cosmonauts themselves, connecting this genre with ideas of the future and outer space in the popular consciousness.



Figure 23: Mescherin Outside Baikonur. Image via Transitions Online.

Another noteworthy composer, Eduard Artemyev, scored the 1963 science fiction film *Meeting a Dream* using the ANS. Like Klushantsev's films, *Meeting a Dream* combined both classical music and electronic music, using classical orchestration for the scenes on Earth as well as a recurring song about space travel that acts as a theme for the film. Once the setting shifts to outer space, electronic instrumentation and sound effects are used. The music used to portray the

²⁰ Ibid.

alien race, the Centurians, is electronic as well. As little is known about the Centurians at first, the music used to depict them is mysterious-sounding, high-pitched and ghostly. Following the initial scene where the Centurians are introduced, the two scientists first discuss their debate about whether the alien race will be hostile or benevolent, further contributing to their mystery. In the end, when the cosmonauts make contact, they discover that the Centurians are kind and cooperative. As the film is overall an optimistic one, electronic music conveys mystery and the alien, but not something fearful. Instead, it is meant to reinforce the unknown nature of a distant civilization, which is a major plot point within the film; viewers do not know until the end whether the Centurians will be benevolent or not.

Music also serves an interesting purpose in the film – it is used as a means to communicate with the Centurians. Upon hearing the film’s theme song, which has been sent out into space, the Centurians are moved, and decide to visit Earth. This film is one of the first to explore the possibility of music bridging the gap between alien races; later films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) expanded on this theme.²¹ In space exploration, Mescherin’s recording of the Internationale was included on board the Sputnik 1, and the Voyager space probe contained a golden record with recordings of different types of music from Earth.²² Music serves as a powerful testament to human culture, and, in space exploration, fulfills a role beyond entertainment. Transcending the language barrier between humanity and alien races, music symbolizes the voice of Earth.

Eduard Artemyev went on to score several more films, notably Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* and *Stalker*. One of the leading ANS composers, Artemyev began working with this instrument in the

²¹ *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Directed by Steven Spielberg, 1977, U.S.A.: Columbia Pictures.

²² Maynes, “Mescherin Blasts Off.”; “Music From Earth,” NASA, <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/music.html>.

early 1960s at inventor Murzin's laboratory.²³ Artemyev became an avid supporter of electronic music, stating in an interview in the 1960s that "the future belonged only to music made with the help of electronics."²⁴ In 1970, he met Tarkovsky at a party, who asked him to compose an electronic soundtrack for *Solaris*, with the only exception being the inclusion of Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Prelude in F-minor "Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesus Christ."²⁵ Artemyev expertly intertwined his electronic score with Bach's classical piece. He used Bach to capture the feeling of Earth, and the repeating refrains of "Ich ruf zu Dir" imply the longing for the past and homesickness of Kelvin while on the Solaris Station. On the other hand, the ANS synthesizer evoked the "primeval" emptiness of space, the alien, and the mysterious.²⁶ As Artemyev refrains from using electronic instrumentation until Kelvin travels to the Solaris Station, he delineates this type of music as "otherworldly." Yet, as the Solaris Station is nearly abandoned and plagued with strange "guests," the manifestations of people from the cosmonauts' memories, the electronic score also evokes feelings of suspense and dread. The uneasy musical environment composed by Artemyev intertwines with Tarkovsky's eerie setting aboard the space station, creating a thoroughly uncanny atmosphere.

The end of the film, however, blurs the lines between the two types of music. As Kelvin walks around his father's dacha, a version of "Ich ruf zu Dir" that combines classical and electronic instrumentation plays. It is then replaced with a more ominous, atmospheric electronic piece as Kelvin embraces his father. The music crescendos and grows more discordant as the camera pans outward and the viewer sees that his father's dacha floats on an island on the

²³ Rais, "Some Notes About Soviet Computer Music," 535; Kreichi, "The ANS Synthesizer," 59.

²⁴ Rais, "Some Notes About Soviet Computer Music," 535.

²⁵ Robert Barry, "Sound On Film: The sound of Soviet Science Fiction," *Sound and Music*, <http://www.soundandmusic.org/features/sound-film/sound-soviet-science-fiction>.

²⁶ Jeremy Barham, "Scoring Incredible Futures: Science Fiction Screen Music, and 'Post-Modernism' as Romantic Epiphany," *The Musical Quarterly*, 91, 3-4 (2009), 266.

surface of *Solaris*, suggesting an ambiguous ending – has Kelvin returned to the past in order to shun technology and escape modernism, has he accepted both the past and present, or does it represent death and rebirth? While Tarkovsky intended the ending to represent “a return to the cradle for the main character Kelvin, after travelling along the path of technological progress,” the combination of the two types of instrumentation suggests a more conflicted outcome.²⁷

Solaris is one of the first films to use electronic music to depict a fearful environment. While earlier utopian films of the 1950s and 1960s used electronic instrumentation to depict the otherworldly and mysterious, it was not ultimately meant to convey a feeling of dread. *Solaris* is not a thriller or horror film, although it does contain elements of psychological terror, particularly when Kelvin encounters his dead wife on the Solaris Station. Through this film, Tarkovsky sets the stage for later films, including one of his own, to shift the use of electronic music back onto Earth in order to depict the alien at home.

Tarkovsky’s films focus on leading the viewer into a strange and unknown world, “where all that was familiar and known has vanished,” not only visually and psychologically, but sonically. *Stalker* in particular “challenge[s] this perception of *normal* reality” in the minds of the viewers by shifting the use of electronic music to Earth instead of outer space.²⁸ Earlier science fiction films established the trope of electronic music as a depiction of outer space and the otherworldly. As viewers were familiar with this association, the inversion of this trope – that is, the use of electronic music to depict Earth – would appear uncanny and bizarre. This was an intentional decision by Tarkovsky; he used “sound in order to define place, whether that be literal, psychological or existing as some kind of parallel reality,” often omitting it altogether

²⁷ Ibid., 266-268.

²⁸ Stefan Smith, “The edge of perception: sound in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*,” *The Soundtrack* 1, no. 1 (2007), 42.

when introducing a new scene in order to allow the viewer to “feel” the new space.²⁹ As with *Solaris*, Artemyev and Tarkovsky worked together closely to create this blending of sonic and visual environments.

From the beginning of the film, natural and electronic sounds are combined, creating a feeling that is simultaneously “both familiar and strange.”³⁰ This is compounded by the fact that the film occurs on Earth, in what appears to be a dystopian future. While exploring the Zone, Artemyev blends the sound of the “natural environment and the *musique concrète*” masterfully, creating a sense of unease and “an ambiguity of time and space.”³¹ Even the diegetic sounds of the natural environment are part of the orchestration, disappearing at will, as if they are part of the imagination of the characters. At various points in the Zone, the sound of water dripping or a river is suddenly replaced by the sound of the wind.³² The film score reinforces the fact that the Zone is meant to be a place out of time governed by faith and feeling instead of logic.

The sonic elements of *Stalker* are carried over into Lopushansky’s films. *Letters from a Dead Man*, composed by Aleksandr Zhurbin, incorporates classical orchestration with electronic instrumentation to create an environment that is simultaneously familiar and alien. Like *Stalker*, diegetic and non-diegetic sound are often blended; in the scenes of people hurrying into fallout shelters, the synthesized sounds of sirens fade in and out, making it unclear whether they are sound effects or part of the film score. In the scene where the children celebrate Christmas with Professor Larsen, an electric organ plays music reminiscent of a church hymn, blending traditional music with modern instrumentation. The final scene, in which the children leave the bunker and face the hostile environment of the surface world in search of a better life, utilizes

²⁹ Ibid., 43.

³⁰ Ibid., 44.

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² Ibid., 48.

classical orchestration for a heart-wrenching piece. In this scene, classical orchestration is perhaps a representation Earth in an optimistic sense, as the use of classical music to represent Earth or one's homeland was a trope from early science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s. Although this final scene is left open-ending and ominous in some ways, the music appears to indicate that the children will find a better future, and the mistakes of the past have not permanently rendered the planet a forbidding, alien place.

Visitor to a Museum carries these ideas further. Composed by Alfred Schnittke, another early ANS musician, the inhuman sound of the ANS synthesizer permeates the film, sonically illustrating the ruined landscape and the protagonist's sense of hopelessness for the future of the world.³³ In the scene before the protagonist visits the church of the degenerates, he has a breakdown at the inn, sobbing as he realizes that they are all trapped in a "prison," the dying planet. A low frequency, pulsing sound is the primary orchestration throughout the scene, appearing to imitate a Mains hum, the 50 Hz tone of electrical power lines. It is interspersed with higher pitched discordant tones, and a garbled sound similar to a computer processor. Many of these sounds are repeated at various points throughout the film. As Lopushansky's films are rife with criticisms of modernity, these sounds suggest a connection between technology and feelings of uneasiness and fear. The narratives and settings of all three of these films are emphasized by the fact that the composers inverted existing cultural tropes of science fiction and electronic music to create an atmosphere of unease on Earth.

As evidenced by the popularity of Mescherin's compositions, electronic music within popular culture grew alongside its use in film scores, particularly from the 1960s until the dissolution of the USSR. This popularity of science fiction and subsequently electronic music

³³ Kreichi, "The ANS Synthesizer," 62.

was due in part to a lack of “presentism,” or aversion to the present and everyday life, among those who came of age during the 1960s to the early 1980s. Russian philologist Marina Kniazeva describes this as originating from the fact that, unlike earlier generations, this generation had no “‘inaugural event’ around which to coalesce as a cohort.”³⁴ In other words, while former generations shaped their identities around formative events such as the 1917 Revolution or World War II, the younger generation had no such event. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak explains that this lack of identity was compounded by rigid nature of Soviet authoritative discourse, which functioned as a linguistic “ritual,” creating a culture in which citizens experienced “internal emigration,” or, in other words, lived simultaneously inside and outside Soviet reality.³⁵ Futuristic or fantastic music, of which electronic music was absolutely an integral part, enabled Soviet youth to envision a time and place separate from the daily life in which they lived. For some, they could envision a future which did not have the problems that existed in the present. For others, they could imagine a place apart from the Soviet Union—a constructed image of the West, a fantasy or science-fiction world, or simply a world without political strife. Both science fiction film and electronic or rock and roll music appealed to many young people as it enabled this escapism from everyday life.

Yurchak explains that Soviet youth often desired a world apart from their present and an interest in futurism, exemplified in the letters between two teenagers, Alexandr and Nikolai, who often wrote to each other about topics ranging from music to philosophy during the 1970s. A recurring theme was Western rock music, which for Alexandr in particular was “compatible with his vision of future-oriented aesthetics.” He felt that the avant-garde, experimental nature of British art rock was “perfectly compatible with communist ideals,” more so than the stagnant

³⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 32.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

party rhetoric of the 1970s.³⁶ He linked these “symbols and forms of [bourgeois] aesthetics” with scientific achievements of the Soviet Union, such as space exploration, suggesting that he drew a connection between this type of music and futuristic ideology.³⁷

In late Soviet context, Yurchak writes, Soviet youth were drawn to experimental music, because it “resonated unusually well with something of which these bands were probably unaware—the futuristic, avant-garde, experimental aesthetics that remained an important part of the ethos of socialism even during the late Soviet period.”³⁸ As with rock music, electronic music allowed Soviet youth an escape from “presentism,” as it was inextricably connected with science fiction film, contributing to this “futuristic ethos” and embodying it more succinctly, through futuristic instruments and sounds.

Electronic music traversed a different evolutionary path in the Eastern Bloc than rock music. Its initial conception through instruments like the theremin predated rock music by a few decades. Although its widespread usage in science fiction film did not begin until the late 1950s, early electronic composers like Eduard Artemyev initially drew from classical music and earlier innovations in Soviet electronic instrumentation to create his film scores, designating the origin of popular electronic film scores as distinct from Western rock influence.³⁹ In the GDR, rock n’ roll did not emerge until the mid-1950s, and even then, it was banned due to its “American origin,” making it difficult to access for many people.⁴⁰ Although it overlapped in theme with rock music in the minds of Soviet youth, as a genre, electronic music was uniquely Soviet at its roots.

³⁶ Ibid., 230-231.

³⁷ Ibid., 234.

³⁸ Ibid., 236.

³⁹ Galina Drubachevskaya, “Edward Artemiev: I Am Sure That There Will Be a Creative Explosion,” *Electroshock.ru*, 1993. <http://www.electroshock.ru/eng/edward/interview/drubachevskaya/index.html>.

⁴⁰ George Maas and Hartmut Reszel, “Whatever Happened To...: The Decline and Renaissance of Rock in the Former GDR,” *Popular Music* 17, no. 3 (1998), 267.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Western electronic groups had become popular within East Germany and the Soviet Union. In the case of East Germany, this popularity led to Tangerine Dream's performance in East Berlin; they were the only Western group to perform in the GDR. While the East German magazine *Melodie & Rhythmus* "described the music as 'endlessly tiring, improvised compositional sketches,'" the East Germans themselves were "thrilled."⁴¹ Eastern Bloc youths responded to Western electronic groups by creating their own electronic music acts, including Zodiac in the USSR and POND in the GDR. Both of these groups released albums with cosmic themes: Zodiac's *Music in the Universe* in 1982 and POND's *Planetenwind* in 1984.⁴² Their success was far-reaching; *Planetenwind* in particular sold over 100,000 copies.⁴³

The influence of foreign electronic music meant that many Soviet musicians wanted to own synthesizers, eventually leading to a flourishing synthesizer market in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ For many years, the electronic musical instrument industry was non-existent. Devices like the ANS synthesizer were hardly portable, unusual, and available only to a small subset of musicians. Western equipment was expensive, and difficult to transport across the border. Vladimir Kuzmin, inventor of the first voltage-controlled synthesizer in the USSR, the Formanta Polivoks, explains that manufacturing plants in the Soviet Union were required to produce consumer goods alongside military products. "There were too many factories, so the planners had to look for additional products," he states. "This explains why Russia produced so many

⁴¹ "Tangerine Dream - Biography," Tangerinedream-music.com. http://www.tangerinedream-music.com/discography_long4.php

⁴² Zodiac, *Music In The Universe*, Melodiya, 1982. L.P.

POND, *Planetenwind*, Amiga, 1984. L.P.

⁴³ "Die POND-Story," Ponderosa-Records.de, <http://www.ponderosa-records.de/>.

⁴⁴ *Elektro Moskva*, Directed by Tikhonova and Spritzendorfer; Many of these instruments have been catalogued in the online archive [ruskeys.net](http://www.ruskeys.net), curated by David Hillel Wilson of the New England Synthesizer Museum: <http://www.ruskeys.net/eng/synths.php>.

electronic musical instruments; they were products proposed by enthusiasts to keep the plants busy.”⁴⁵ Whimsically, one of these instruments was named after a science fiction film - the Aelita synthesizer. The Alisa series synthesizers may have been named after science fiction character Alisa Selezneva, a popular figure in a series of novels as well as films, although the origin of the name is unclear.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the connection between science fiction and electronic music popularized these instruments, inspiring many musicians to create their own sounds of space.

The popular cultural origins of these instruments were in early science fiction films, which first began using electronic music to portray outer space and alien planets or civilizations. While shown as mysterious or unlike Earth, the overall feeling of optimism within these films does not connect any negative associations with this music. *Solaris* was one of the first films to introduce a sense of fear and uncanniness that was tied to electronic music, through the eerie setting on the Solaris Station and the strange events that occur there. *Stalker*, *Letters from a Dead Man*, and *Visitor to a Museum* inverted earlier associations of electronic music with alien worlds; in these films, this music is meant to evoke the “estrangement of Earth itself, the transformation of the homeworld into a landscape at once alien and hostile.”⁴⁷ As themes in Soviet science fiction changed so too did the film scores to better represent dystopia.

Initially, science fiction film used electronic music to depict travel into space and faraway worlds. The use of this type of music in space education films as well as the close association of famous electronic composers like Mescherin with the Soviet space program wedded electronic music and outer space in the minds of the Soviet people. By the 1970s and 1980s, as Soviet

⁴⁵ Gordon Reid, “Formanta Polivoks Synthesizer: The Story of the Polivoks,” *Sound on Sound* (July 2010). <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jul10/articles/polivoks.htm>.

⁴⁶ Alisa Selezneva figured in the series of children’s science fiction novels by Kir Bulychov, the film *Mystery of the Third Planet* (1981), and the television series *Guest from the Future* (1985).

⁴⁷ Barry, “Sound on film.”

citizens grew more dissatisfied with everyday life, electronic music began to be used to depict the “alien” on Earth within films, suggesting that ordinary life was no longer as familiar as it used to be. This was likely due to a variety of factors; although Soviet citizens had greater freedom in the 1980s under Gorbachev, they also had greater access to information about the outside world and problems within the Soviet Union. Electronic music fluctuated with trends in science fiction to bring a sense of the “otherworldly” to life, whether on far-off planets or at home, remaining a relevant and interesting part of film orchestration, and later, a popular genre alongside Western rock music. Both of these genres granted Soviet young people a reprieve from everyday problems: through electronic music, they envisioned distant worlds, just as rock music granted them a vision of the “Imaginary West.” The popularity of science fiction among Soviet people, especially Soviet youth, and the frequent use of electronic music in science fiction suggests that the later popularity of electronic music was due in large part to the use of this music in film scores.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored Soviet science fiction films from the 1950s to the 1980s, and the development of electronic music and instruments in the USSR. Over this time, science fiction film followed a trajectory from optimism to pessimism and ambiguity that paralleled politics in the Soviet Union and the events of the Cold War. The trajectory of these films revealed a major shift from the early years of the space race, when the Khrushchev administration carried out liberalizing reforms and the Soviet Union underwent de-Stalinization, to the years of détente, when excessive bureaucracy and stagnation under Brezhnev's leadership led to apathy and dissatisfaction for many Soviet young people, and uncertainty about the future of the Soviet Union. Despite the tapering off of space race tensions following the American moon landing in 1969, science fiction continued to remain a popular genre for many Soviet citizens. The soundtracks within these films, largely composed on electronic instruments, brought these alien worlds to life, giving them a voice completely unlike anything heard before. Science fiction films were shot through with political meaning, from above and from below, tracing themes of nationality and unity to individual identity and faith. Music, from film scores to musicians, connected youth culture and film. Soviet youth were drawn to the imaginary worlds of science fiction, both literature and film, and the innovation and avant-garde aesthetics found within experimental music from the West and the Eastern Bloc. In science fiction and electronic music, young people found an escape from the present and hope for the future.

The political themes explored in Soviet science fiction films are both those of the Soviet government and those of everyday life. The utopian worlds explored within the light-hearted adventure tales in films of the early space race, like *The Sky Calls*, *Planet of Storms*, and *Meeting a Dream* is reflective of the cultural zeitgeist of the Khrushchev period. Initially, many Soviet

people felt optimistic about this turning point in Soviet history. Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalin's personality cult and subsequent liberalizations and reforms inspired hope and confidence in socialism. The space race against the United States and new emphasis on scientific and technological fields encouraged Soviet citizens, especially young people, to reach for the stars. The heroic cosmonauts in these early science fiction films brought the imagery of propaganda posters to life; confident and smiling, these brave men and women explored the cosmos, rescuing those in need and discovering the unknown.

These hopes were dashed by the "loss" of the space race with the 1969 American moon landing, disillusion with the government following the events of the Prague Spring, and subsequent restrictions on behavior and tighter censorship under the Brezhnev administration. While some, especially older generations who had witnessed turbulent times during the Russian Revolution and World War II, were satisfied with the stability offered during the Brezhnev era, many young people felt lost, bored, and apathetic toward politics.

Science fiction films from the 1970s and 1980s began to address these feelings, telling tales of ordinary people searching for connections with other people, finding a sense of identity or faith, seeking to right the wrongs of the world in the face of overwhelming odds. Directors like Andrei Tarkovsky and Konstantin Lopushansky, who used their films as a medium to express their own dissatisfaction with the regime, spoke to cynical, apathetic people, encouraging them to look inward and cultivate their own beliefs and sense of self, while maintaining awareness of the world around them. *Solaris* dismantles tropes of heroism and overcoming all trials with logic; Tarkovsky details the necessity of love and human connection, instead of single-minded focus on science and logic. *Stalker* explores the human psyche and the navigation of life, emphasizing that sometimes one must feel his or her way through the intangible obstacles with which he or she is

faced. In these cases, someone does not always need physical strength, reason, or ideology; sometimes belief in oneself or what is truly best for the greater good is more important. While films like Lopushansky's *Letters from a Dead Man* and *Visitor to a Museum* have dystopian narratives and settings, the underlying message is one of encouragement; one must persevere even when times are darkest. Both of his films encourage the viewer to look beyond the material, addressing the increased consumerism of the Brezhnev era, and prevent disaster before the world is beyond repair. Tarkovsky's and Lopushansky's films explore what it is to be a believer or a nonbeliever, encouraging viewers to follow their own path instead of continuing the mistakes of generations before.

Advances in musical technology during the early- to mid-twentieth century brought about electroacoustic instrumentation, sonically illustrating fantastic worlds and lending voices to alien creatures with instruments like the theremin and ANS synthesizer, and captivating the minds and hearts of young people with these otherworldly sounds. In science fiction films of the Khrushchev era, electronic music symbolized outer space, distant planets, and the unknown, connecting these images of space and the alien with this mysterious new music. The tradition of electronic music in science fiction film continued with Tarkovsky's and Lopushansky's films, who used this type of music for an unsettling effect, to symbolize the uncanny, or alien and nightmarish settings on Earth. Science fiction film facilitated the connection in the cultural consciousness of electronic music with outer space and other worlds. Electronic music grew in popularity alongside Western rock music, creating an image of the "faraway elsewhere" in the minds of Soviet youth, just as rock music symbolized the "Imaginary West," eventually driving the Soviet Union to create its own synthesizers so that Soviet people could possess the means to create their own cosmic sounds. Ultimately, music was the impetus for this thesis; it drove youth

culture and connected many of the themes touched upon in this work – identity, belonging, escapism.

This thesis has explored themes of individuality, escapism, politics, and faith within Soviet science fiction film, electronic music, and youth subcultures, and underscores the need for further research on the cultural and social impact of science fiction. The history of Soviet science fiction films shows that it can be subjected to the same sort of analysis used in studies of popular music, fashion, and other youth subcultures. Soviet science fiction film in particular would benefit from a discussion of gender, especially as there were generally more women in technology-related fields from the 1950s to the 1980s in the Soviet Union than in the United States, and complex, frequently changing ideals of masculinity and femininity, often portrayed in the films under review here. The voices of women of science fiction deserve to be heard, and their characterization and representation within these films should be examined further. *Samizdat fantastiki*, or science fiction fanzines, would also be a productive source for future study; they might reveal the types of literature Soviet youth enjoyed reading outside of “official” channels, as well as offer insight into the stories that they wrote themselves. In addition, the science fiction fan clubs that published these fanzines are another type of youth subculture on which little scholarship exists. Soviet electronic music, too, is a relatively recent topic of scholarship with much potential. The documentary *Elektro Moskva* touches on the commercial synthesizer industry in the Soviet Union and the thriving DIY culture and innovation of Soviet people in the creation of electronic instruments and gadgets. I eagerly await further historical study into this phenomenon. Perhaps this will be a topic of future study.

The post-Stalin era in the Soviet Union was a turbulent time characterized by a rich cultural history that is still being explored. The increase in leisure time from the beginning of the

Khrushchev era until the dissolution of the USSR gave Soviet people more time to engage in hobbies and to develop social identities, leading to the development of and participation in subcultures. Within subcultures for interests ranging from fashion to literary genres to music, young people began developing a greater sense of individuality and identity, something that the Soviet system did not adequately provide for them. Although politics permeated many aspects of Soviet life, Soviet youth retreated into the spaces provided by subcultures as a shelter from ideology, as a way to develop their own identities and have their voices heard. Science fiction and electronic music spoke to the need of Soviet youth to believe in something greater, to envision a place apart from their daily lives, shaping fantastic worlds in their minds.

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